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# HÉLÈNE

Alexandre

HERZL







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# H É L È N E.

A NOVEL.

BY  
MRS. ARTHUR KENNARD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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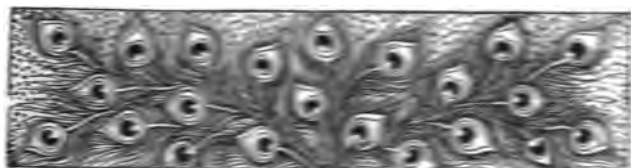
TO THE  
Memory of the  
TRUEST OF FRIENDS AND WITTIEST OF COMPANIONS,

RALPH BERNAL OSBORNE,

I DEDICATE MY BOOK.







# HÉLÈNE.

## CHAPTER I.

‘Zug der Glück nach jener Seite,  
Statt der Schwestern, statt der Eltern,  
Statt der Tod im Himmelsweite,  
Sie die Einzige, zu Späth!’

HELENA.

*162*  
**ALTHOUGH** not a perfect type of beauty, like her Greek ancestress and namesake, surely my Helen—with her ripple of dusky hair, dark grey eyes, and subtle, poignant grace—is fair enough to set those forces at work that create dramas—ay, and tragedies too—in the history of the ordinary routine of life. When I introduce her to the reader, she is





# HÉLÈNE.



## CHAPTER I.

‘Zog der Blick nach jener Seite,  
Statt der Schluchten, statt der Höhn,  
Statt der Erd im Himmelsweite,  
Sie die Einzige, zu Spähn.’

HELENA.

*h* **A**LTHOUGH not a perfect type of beauty, like her Greek ancestress and namesake, surely my Helen—with her ripple of dusky hair, dark grey eyes, and subtle piquant grace—is fair enough to set those forces at work that create dramas—ay, and tragedies too—in the history of the ordinary routine of life. When I introduce her to the reader, she is

sitting comfortably ensconced in an arm-chair, her head thrown back, her daintily-shod feet stretched out on the fire-stool, her hand resting beside the page of note-paper on which she has been writing. Her whole appearance gives you the impression of something foreign, or, as the Scotch say, 'outlandish;' the neck is too slight, the wrist too slender—she is too small-jointed and small-boned for an Englishwoman; while the delicate pallor that warms to colour so easily, the rare smile and changing expression, stamp her as being a descendant of one of the Latin races.

It is a perplexing, misleading, delusive face! A man induced to believe, by the tender tremble of the lips, that he had awakened some sensibility, would soon have found himself undeceived by the candid gaze of the eyes; it is, in fact, the face of a woman who, living on mystical, intangible things, and nurturing a visionary imagination on dreams and romances, has never dreamt a dream or gone through a romance on her own account.

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The framework of the picture is hardly equal to its merits.

Falling through the frosty panes, the feeble rays of the March sun light up a brilliantly green carpet, shine upon a cut-glass chandelier that hangs above, causing a hundred prismatic colours to glance on every side, and throw a golden halo round a worsted-work Arab steed and rider, that stands as a screen on the opposite side of the fireplace. The furniture of the apartment had belonged to Miss Byers's father when he was rector of Stourton: the massive mahogany chairs, with their worn leather seats, had then a certain dignity of their own; but in an unlucky moment Amelia, seized with a wish to regenerate them into a fashionable 'suite,' had covered the leather with green rep, and surrounded the tops of the poor gouty-looking old legs with yellow gimp. A sofa, upholstered to match, stood against the wall, on the hard surface of which Diogenes alone—when in hard condition, after three months' *villegiatura* in his tub—could have reclined

comfortably ; next it, in the corner of the room opposite the fire, was placed a round table, laden with gorgeously bound books and a Bohemian cut-glass vase.

The harshness of the green cover of the chair on which she sat seemed defiantly stiff beside the clinging folds of the young woman's soft Indian cashmere gown ; the crocheted antimacassar was inadaptable to the soft, low-lying roll of her hair ; and the elaborate wall-paper was certainly not a fit background to the refined delicacy of her small, oval face and pale complexion.

Little, however, did these incongruities disturb her mind, which was exclusively devoted to the composition of the letter lying on the blotter before her. Among her gifts (and she had some) my heroine could not count the pen of a ready writer.

‘ Maplewood Lodge, Stourton,  
‘ March 15th, 18—.

‘ *CHÈRE PETITE MÈRE,*

‘ Why don't you write to me ? I wish I could fly home, find out the cause, and give you either a good hug or a

good scolding. I am sure if you were suffering from one of your 'long' headaches Uncle Laurence would let me know. I am so happy here, I feel quite wicked, knowing you are in that black horrible atmosphere. Everyone is so hospitable, I don't know who is the kindest—Mr. Byers, Amelia or Mary. The world around me is bright and gay, the sun shining outside, and the fire crackling within. I am happy and contented, and only long for you to be here. This is the third letter I have written without an answer. There is ever so much more news you would like to know, but I won't tell one single scrap, because you don't deserve it.

‘Your loving daughter,

‘HÉLÈNE MARGUERITE DE FERRIN.

‘There is only one Roman Catholic chapel in the neighbourhood, and that is at Stourton Court, two miles away. Do not be angry, therefore, dear mother, if I am unable to follow the observances of our Church next Sunday.’



Quite proud of her literary prowess, Helen folded, closed, and directed the letter,

‘ Mme. De Carrel,  
‘ 12, Russell Place,  
‘ Fitzroy Square,’

and put it on the table by the inkstand.

She then took up an artistically vellum-bound book that lay on the other side, and began reading listlessly. It was a volume of Tennyson’s poems, lent her by her host, Mr. Byers, who, as he said, wished to show her there was something ‘more to be got in England than horseradish-sauce and roast beef.’ Helen always vowed that she did not care for modern sentimental poetry, not even for that of her own country, France. How then expect her to appreciate the ‘Medley,’ with its whimsical intricacy? A frown gathered between the delicately marked eyebrows, and an impatient jerk was given to one of the small feet when she first began. Presently, however, the pages were turned more slowly, a smile hovered round the mobile lips, and at last she let

the book fall in her lap, bent forward, poked up the fire, a mystified tender look illumining her face, while she murmured softly :

“ Dear,  
Look up, and let thy nature strike on mine,  
Like yonder morning on the blind half world ;  
Approach and fear not ; breathe upon my brows ;  
In that fine air I tremble, all the past  
Melts mist-like into this bright hour, and this  
Is more to more, and all the rich to-come  
Reels, as the golden autumn woodland reels  
Athwart the smoke of burning weeds. Forgive me,  
I waste my heart in signs ; let be. My bride,  
My wife, my life ! Oh, we will walk this world  
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,  
And so through those dark gates across the wild  
That no man knows. Indeed I love thee ; come,  
Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself ;  
Lay thy sweet hands in mine ; and trust in me.”

‘ How well that scene would recite ! I should like to act a love-scene once, to see if I could make people feel it ; but here I am actually becoming sentimental and spoiling my complexion.’

Jumping up as she thus ended her soliloquy, the young woman took a small hand-screen from the chimney-piece, and, leaning

back, held it between her and the fire. This screen was one of a pair, both masterpieces of Miss Amelia's art; indeed, they and the cross-stitch Arab were the sole laurels that crowned her brow. As the warriors of old ceased to strive once they gained the Olympian olive-wreath, so Miss Byers had retired content with these achievements.

The screen was made of thick cardboard, adorned on one side with a water-colour representation of a magnificent moss-rose, while on the other were pasted mementoes of hers and her sister's lives; valentines on rice-paper, with wreaths of forget-me-nots, and 'Remember me' written inside; a sepia drawing of a small boy turning the hand of a clock, with 'L'Amour fait passe le Temps' inscribed on the dial-plate; an old-fashioned engraving of a lady attired in a very scanty muslin gown, pushing back the branches of a clump of bushes, and finding Love asleep behind them, were some of the subjects laid, in artistic confusion, one on top of the other.

Helen could not resist a laugh as she thought of Miss Amelia, with her barrel-curls, in connection with love, and dial-plates, and forget-me-nots. Merrily and musically did it ripple from her lips, until, startled at her solitary display of amusement, she looked round to see if anyone had heard. Satisfied on that point, the culprit laid her hand against her cheeks, which were flushed with excitement, generated by the combined effects of reading sentimental poetry and sitting in front of the fire.

‘Gracious me, I’m glad Amelia wasn’t there! Fancy if she had heard me! I wonder what o’clock it is.’ And with a yawn she left her chair, and sauntered to the window.

The front garden of Maplewood Lodge consisted of a sloping lawn, surrounded by flower-beds, and divided down the middle by a gravel path. This path descended towards a wall—the boundary of the high-road. The ground became so steep ere it reached the summit, that it was obliged perforce to precipitate itself into stone steps;

these steps led to the entrance, which was guarded by an oaken gate labelled in gold letters 'Maplewood Lodge.' High up on an embankment the other side of the road, and on a level with the garden, stood a row of majestic elms, surrounded by trees of a slighter growth; and through the tracery of their branches Helen could see a sweep of brown field glistening and gleaming, while beyond stretched a distant landscape veiled in blue mist. The sun's rays fell, filtered through the network, making the trunks look yellow, and red, and purple; the buds seemed almost bursting their husky sheaths; in the field the rooks were cawing, the sheep bleating—all announced the advent of spring. To the right the road led down the hill to the village. By the tinkling of bells, the steam rising over the wall from the horses' coats, and the voices of men talking, Helen knew that a farm-waggon was resting on the ascent. She could catch a glimpse, too, of a scarlet handkerchief, and thought she could detect the lighter tones of a woman's voice among the men's deeper

ones. It was a fair English scene, and our heroine stood looking at it dreamily, wistfully, feeling the influences of the coming renewal of life enter into her heart. Hardly did she look round even, as the door behind her opened and a lady entered the room. The new-comer was dressed in a plain black gown—Miss Amelia always wore black, it was *so* economical and *so* convenient in case anyone died! Her hair was neatly rolled in curls on either side of her face, under a white muslin cap, that was a compromise between the coquettish ‘Watteau’ of youth and the ample head-gear of old age.

‘There! Anne has forgotten to pull down the blinds again; how careless she is! The sun will take all the colour out of the carpet.’ Walking across the room as she spoke, Amelia gave an energetic pull to the blind-cord of the farthest window. ‘And this book—it is John’s Tennyson. You were using it, Helen, I suppose? And the inkbottle too?’

‘Yes, those are all my belongings; untidy as usual, you see.’

‘Never mind ; I do fidget, don’t I ? But what are you doing ? Dreaming, I suppose.’

‘Dear me, no ! I have toasted myself warm. I have written a letter to my mother. I have read the whole of the “ Princess.” ’

‘Right through ?’

‘Well, perhaps not quite. I skipped at the beginning. But isn’t it a pleasure to live and idle in such a nice warm room, with the sunshine outside, and everything bright and happy ?’ And the young woman wiped away the mist her breath had left on the window-pane, and leant her head on her arm against the sash with a sigh of content.

‘Come here, Amelia,’ she added presently. ‘I want you to tell me the history of all these scraps.’

‘Why ? what ? that ?’ And Miss Byers came over to where she stood, and took the screen from her. ‘They all belonged to my father and to Mary. My father was very angry, I remember, when he found

that I had cut up some of his Bartolozzis. As to valentines and love-letters, I never had such a thing in my life. Poor dear Mary! I remember rifling her desk for some of them; this one with the forget-me-nots, and "Remember me," was sent to her, I think, after her first ball, by young Ward, a lieutenant in the army: Mary was always fond of sentiment and soldiers. He was very bad, poor young man, for the time the attack lasted, but he got over it. This sepia drawing, which I have cut out so artistically, was, I believe, a wonderful Bartolozzi. I found it in an old portfolio, and thought it would look nice here. I don't think very much of it, do you? And Miss Amelia held the screen a little away to get a better view.

'I can see it is a very fine specimen,' said Helen, with a smile. 'But tell me more about Mary's valentines.'

'Which particular one has excited your curiosity—this with the dove and the letter? My father's curate, I think, sent her that; but I really don't remember—it



might have been anonymous. You see, Mary was a beauty in those days ; she used often to have proposals at balls. But—why, here actually is one that was sent to me. You see this with the motto, “ May life to thee be a perpetual spring.” It has not been a perpetual spring, as you may have observed, my dear ; but the wish was none the less sincere on the part of the sender.’

‘ Who was it ? ’ asked Helen, coming closer and looking over her companion’s shoulder.

‘ It was Dr. Clark.’

‘ What, the old fellow we saw yesterday, who talked about the Duke of Wellington, and had a bald head like a copper saucepan ? ’

‘ Yes ; why not ? ’ asked Amelia testily. ‘ He may have a head like a saucepan, but I can tell you he has good stock stewing inside. He is far the best doctor in Stourton.’

Helen, seeing she had unwittingly hurt Miss Byers’s feelings, put her arm round her

waist, and laying her cheek against hers, said coaxingly : ' I am sure he is very clever, and very good—he looks it ; but, dear Amelia, his head *is* very polished, and he *does* refer to the Duke of Wellington.'

' I dare say if you had seen him as I have by the bedside of the sick and dying, you would forget his peculiarities ; but,' she added, putting the screen back on the chimney-piece, and evidently anxious to change the subject, ' what really brought me here just now was to arrange what we should do this afternoon. I wanted to call on the Corbetts—those new people on the hill—and then I thought we might go on to Stourton and see Lady Perceval. I have not been there for some time, and I should like to introduce you. A good word from Lady Perceval goes a long way in the county, I can tell you. Will you come ?'

' I shall be delighted ; but are you sure I am not taking Mary's place ?'

' Certain ! You know how little Mary goes out ; she is complaining of cold, too, this morning, and is afraid of the easterly

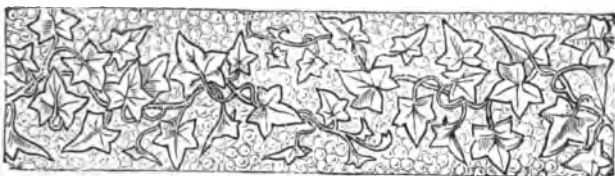
wind. Come along to lunch now. I will order the carriage for three o'clock.'

'Would it not be much nicer to walk?' asked Helen tentatively, rather shirking a long drive in a close carriage.

'My dear, what are you thinking of? The whole neighbourhood would talk if we went visiting on foot.'

Having delivered herself of this reproof, Amelia led the way across the hall, to the accompaniment of the clamorous tones of a gong which filled the house with waves and throbs of sound.





## CHAPTER II.

‘Ne vous attachez point à la surface des hommes, et creusez quand vous voudrez trouver ; le talent se cache toujours. Ne voyez-vous pas que la perle demeure ensevelie au fond de l’océan, tandis que les cadavres remontent à la surface des flots ?’

**T**HE circle in which the Countess de Ferrin found herself a visitor consisted of Mr. Byers and his sisters, Miss Amelia and Miss Mary Byers, all of them the children of the former rector of Stourton. At an early age Mr. Byers had refused to entertain the idea of taking Holy Orders, and leaving home went to London, where by his practical common-sense he made a handsome competency at the Bar. He was a serene, moderate, liberal-minded man, holding views of his own, but

careful not to interfere with other people's. He was never discomposed, never in a hurry, and let the affairs of the world and his own get on as well as they could, without troubling himself much about them. Although an uncompromising Radical in the midst of a strictly Conservative county, no one had ever heard of his having a difference of opinion with any member of the community.

John and his sister Amelia were diametrically opposed in every way—'You might as well,' as the Yankees say, 'have shut a satin vest and a nutmeg-grater in the same drawer,' as these two into the same house—but you never could have guessed it by any exterior manifestation on his part.

Although a Radical, Mr. Byers was fond of culture and beautiful things; and had ever since he had been independent lived among artists. When his father and mother died, he had been unselfish enough entirely to change his mode of life; and taking his two sisters to reside with him, he bought Maplewood Lodge, and settled at Stourton. They

had rewarded his generosity by the deepest affection and the tenderest care ; but it had often been a difficult task on his part to try and bear Amelia's utter want of education on the subject of art. She would have done a great deal for her brother, and indeed, as it was, devoted herself to serving him ; but she had positive views on things, and found it impossible to relinquish the splendours of her green and gold drawing-room for anything more subdued in colour, and more in consonance with what he liked. After a long and brave fight, he at last laid down his arms, and retired worsted, contenting himself henceforth with a war of gentle irony, directed for the most part against Amelia and Amelia's aider and abettor Anne, housekeeper and cook of the establishment.

As a rule his shafts fell harmless, and the quotations which he frequently made from Voltaire, Rousseau, and other doubtful quarters, on purpose to shock his sister, passed unnoticed. He was all the more delighted, therefore, to find an appreciative audience in Helen who had that responsiveness of

mind that enabled her to understand at once any witticism or banter. In a very short time a secret freemasonry was established between her and her host, and she would sit listening with a smile to his 'escapades,' while the objects of his raillery were completely unconscious of any double meaning in his remarks. As the days went by the two sympathetic minds converged more and more towards one another; and though Helen sat contentedly in Miss Byers's drawing-room in the morning, she often managed in the afternoon or evening to find her way into the congenial atmosphere of Mr. Byers's study: there the pens and ink were always perfect, the books easily got at, the papers were within reach; and she would spend hours reading or talking with its occupant about art and books.

Mr. Byers was a bit of a philosopher, and would talk about Comte or John Stuart Mill, or would quote extracts from the 'Harmonie Universelle,' or the 'Contrat Social,' to her great delight; for although the least theoretical of women in reality,

Helen loved to gaze at distant horizons until her sight became dimmed and dazed. Miss Byers called them a couple of geese for their pains, but that did not prevent their thoroughly enjoying one another's company.

The origin of the Byers' friendship with Helen was a curious one. They were passing through Paris on their way home from Germany, and, wishing to buy a wedding present for the daughter of a friend, they had gone to a fan-shop, of which an artistic friend of Mr. Byers's had given them the address. It was situate in a narrow street off the Boulevard du Temple. On the fourth floor of one of the old-fashioned houses of the quarter they entered a room, where, laid out on the counter, they saw hundreds of the most exquisitely painted fans, while in the glass cases against the walls were masterpieces of Boucher and his school, executed on chicken-skin, with painted and carved handles, worth inestimable sums.

They entered into conversation with the



intelligent French saleswoman who submitted some of the prettiest modern ones for their approval. Seeing that there was nothing that quite suited them, she at last pulled open a drawer, and, taking out the sheeny satin and silk squares, with their delicate tracery of cupids, flowers, and monograms, said :

‘ These are all painted by the same person. I could get anything you like done by her to order.’

Mr. Byers began to explain his ideas, Miss Amelia chiming in with hers ; greatly to the despair of the poor Frenchwoman, who found it very difficult to arrive at a true comprehension of their desires, when suddenly the shop-door bell rang behind them, the door opened, and the fan-painter herself entered the shop, carrying a small portfolio.

Having been told the business in hand, Countess de Ferrin, for it was she, made a slight sketch of what she thought would suit the English ladies and gentleman ; and said that, if they liked to entrust the com-

mission to her, she would execute it to the best of her ability ; but, in case there might be any doubt, she would be most happy, she said, to bring it to their hotel for their inspection before it was completed.

With his natural kindness and courtesy, especially where a pretty woman was concerned, Mr. Byers objected to giving her the trouble of going as far as the Rue de Rivoli, but suggested that they should, on the contrary, meet again at the same place a few days later. Adding many thanks for his kind consideration, and an expression of hope that she would be able to give them satisfaction, the young woman took her departure.

When she was gone, the shopwoman began singing the Countess de Ferrin's praises. She told her customers what a *distinguée* lady she was, and how she worked to support her mother, who was also '*très comme il faut*,' '*une compatriote de ces dames*'—indeed, so glowing was her account that she even overcame Amelia's reluctance to place implicit belief in a person who was so very charmingly dressed and had such

wonderfully fitting gloves and such well-shod feet. When they met again, advances were made to greater intimacy on both sides ; the hackneyed statement anent the smallness of the world was still further exemplified in this case by Mr. Byers making the discovery that he knew some of the Ferrers—Hélène de Ferrin's connections on her mother's side ; and from their second meeting began an acquaintance which soon ripened into a friendship. Every time they went to Paris one of the first things the Byers' did was to go and call in the Rue Jacob, Faubourg Saint Germain, where the mother and daughter lived ; and many were the expeditions they went together, both in Paris itself and its environs. At last they persuaded both ladies to come and settle for a time in London. There Mr. Byers, through his artistic connection, succeeded in getting Helen plenty of orders for fans, panels, glove-boxes, bonbonnières—all those trifles which the rich population of London give such fabulous sums for, but which, alas ! bring such poor remuneration to the work-

people who manufacture them. Helen made enough, however, at first, to pay hers and her mother's expenses, and was even enabled to leave her work for a time, and accept the Byers' invitation to spend a week or two with them at Stourton.

'Well, and what do you think of our Poet Laureate?' asked her host, as soon as the intrusive sound of the gong allowed his voice to be audible.

'You must give me more time to judge. I have only read the poem through quickly. I did not like it at all when I first began, but I thought the scene at the end between Ida and the Prince very dramatic. I should like to learn to recite it.'

'To recite it?' echoed Miss Byers, in astonishment.

'Yes; when all trades fail I shall take to recitations.'

'In public?'

'Why not?'

'My dear,' said Mary Byers, interfering, as she often did when she saw Amelia about to enunciate one of her emphatic expressions

of disapprobation, 'you must not let my brother induce you to become a bookworm like himself. You are too pretty and too young to destroy your eyesight.' And, as she spoke, she stroked Helen's hand, and swayed backwards and forwards in a meditative way she had, that reminded you of a bird. It was easy still to see the remains of beauty in Mary Byers's gentle face, and it was impossible to help loving her, with her soft voice and caressing manner, to which her slight deafness gave a pathetic emphasis. She had won the young Frenchwoman's heart from the first.

'Don't be afraid, dear Mary,' she answered. 'I will never kill myself with over-study. I am a great deal too fond of running about and amusing myself for that.'





### CHAPTER III.

*'On la disait trop difficile et portée à l'originalité, défaut plus inquiétant qu'un vice aux yeux des gens de son entourage.'*

**A**T three o'clock the brougham, with its one horse and antiquated coachman, was at the door—there was a carriage-approach to Maplewood at the back—and Helen and Miss Byers, armed with card-cases, muffs, fur-rug, and hot-water tins, set off on their round of visits.

'To Deringham, William; and mind you drive slowly up the hill.'

Helen smiled as she heard the injunction, remembering William's usual pace.

Contrary to her expectations, however, she enjoyed the expedition thoroughly, and

did not mind how slow or how fast William went. The air was still, with a promise of warmth and summer in it. A few prim-roses were already beginning to show their yellow discs in the banks and hedgerows; the pigeons were cooing and shaking out their feathers on the sunny, moss-grown cottage roofs. As the road ascended higher, they could see the valley on one side, with its village and church-steeple lying under the pale light of the winter afternoon; on the other stretched a wide expanse of fertile upland, intersected with hedges and streams, and bounded far in the distance by a blue line of hills. Close at hand, the woods and banks glistened with the drops of melted frost, though in the shade the road was still covered with a thin white carpet, marked here and there by the brown grooves of a cart-wheel.

Helen lay back and let the influences of the scene creep over her. She had no deep emotion hidden in her heart, no memories of great sorrow, that the new life that was stirring around her could evoke, and yet

tears rose to her eyes, she hardly knew why. She would have given worlds to ask Miss Byers to put the window on her side down, and let the sweet-scented air blow in and chase her sadness away, but did not like to interrupt the flood of information. Amelia thought it necessary to pour forth for the benefit of her *protégée*, whom she was to launch for the first time that day amongst the county magnates.

‘These Corbetts, you know, my dear, made their fortune in tea or coffee, or, indeed, it may have been opium—something foreign at all events; and Mr. Corbett thought he would like to come down here and transform himself into a country gentleman and a patron of art. So he has built himself a wonderful house. The decorations cost thousands. The hall and drawing-room are only just finished. Young Gordon, the rising artist, did them. John says they are atrocious in design and drawing, but all the Corbett set think them “full of exquisite sentiment and noble grace,” and a great deal more that is part



of their jargon. You must not express an opinion remember, for I think young Gordon is stopping there just now. Mark my words, while they are chattering about culture, repose, and subtlety—for these are all great words in the Corbett vocabulary—that young gentleman who leads the van will show sufficient culture and subtlety to walk off with one of the nieces; for Mr. and Mrs. Corbett have no children of their own, so all the money will go to Florence and Margaret, his brother's daughters. They have plenty as it is from their father, who was also in the business, but money makes money. Rich men like to leave their fortunes where there was some before; so these girls will be great catches. Mrs. Corbett might be invaluable to you in a business way. I advise you to pay a little court to her; she is good-natured enough. But here we are.'

As the carriage made a sharp turn, there was a moment's delay while the iron gate was swung back; the wheels passed with a muffled sound over gravel towards a house

dimly seen through the trees, and then rolled under a wide portico. On being shown into the drawing-room, they found it full of people, sitting and standing about—some surrounding the tea-table, that was bright with silver and china, and laden with cakes, biscuits, and bread and butter; others standing near the fire, the warm glow of which was grateful enough after the cold outside. From both sides came a perfect babel of conversation. It stopped for a moment as the new-comers entered, and almost all turned to look at them.

Presently, with great rustle of silk and jingle of bracelets, a tall figure came forward to greet them.

‘How do you do, Miss Byers? I am so glad to see you. And this is your friend, Countess de Ferrin. Won’t you come and sit here near the fire? You must be so cold. What wretched weather, isn’t it? Our young people have actually been skating to-day. It is so good of you to come out. You arrived last week, didn’t you? Charming people, the Byers’,

aren't they? We are all so fond of them,' as Amelia passed on to speak to Mr. Corbett. 'You knew them in Paris, didn't you? How long are you going to stay? Won't you take off your fur, otherwise you will catch cold when you go out?'

To this flow of questions and observations Helen responded syllabically. She was bewildered by the heat, the number of people, the perfume of the flowers, and the room itself, which was decorated according to the canons of the artistic taste of the day—the walls painted Pompeian red to a certain height; while above, ladies were depicted walking about on dark green swards enamelled with yellow star-like flowers, backgrounds of dark woods and salmon-coloured sunsets stretching behind them. The furniture was a medley of every taste and every incongruity possible. French boule cabinets, Japanese fans and vases, English furniture and stuffs, made a compound utterly amazing to a person coming from a land where the fitness of things is so thoroughly understood.

With an effort she at last turned her attention from the room to its occupants. Some of the guests were stopping in the house ; others, hatted and cloaked, had evidently come to pay an afternoon visit. There were Mrs. Corbett's two nieces, one looking tall and slight in her green cashmere gown, that encased her as an orchid is encased in a leafy sheath ; the other with fluffy fair hair that in certain lights looked red, a type of the ordinary English girl, sweet and fresh, but with a stereotyped smile and immobility of expression that deprived the face of much of its charm. Talking to them was the clergyman of the parish, a man of about fifty, who, with his muddy boots, florid complexion, and fussy excited manner, seemed to be out in the cold, amidst the semi-artistic, semi-fashionable society. A sprinkling of young men stood at the other end of the room, amongst whom Helen observed one, with an intellectual face, long hair, and low-cut collar, laying down the law to the circle of devotees who surrounded him. The rest

of the company consisted of a niece of Mr. Brotherton the clergyman's, a pretty girl with dark eyes and golden hair ; and a little woman seated at the opposite side of the fireplace, whose red nose and perpetual trick of shivering betrayed a bad circulation. She kept her feet crossed on the fender, knitted diligently, hardly ever raising her eyes when spoken to. Mrs. Corbett presently informed Helen in a loud whisper that she was a Mrs. Langham, 'such a sweet creature,' and a 'most superior woman.' It puzzled Helen for a time to find out how she was 'superior,' as she seemed an inoffensive, yea and nay person, with no particular views. There was a Colonel Langham somewhere ; Helen looked for him with a languid interest as the probable future wearer of the stocking she saw in process of knitting, but could not make him out.

'How long are you going to stay here, Countess de Ferrin ?' went on Mrs. Corbett's voice.

‘I do not know yet.’

‘Is it not a lovely place—so artistic? I feel certain you are in love with it already; I am so glad Mr. Corbett settled down here. Such a charming neighbourhood. Don’t you think so?’

‘I have not seen much of it yet, so am hardly a fair judge.’

‘I find it such a nice place for girls, too—so many musical and artistic people; and then one can so easily fill from London. Colonel and Mrs. Langham arrived from town yesterday evening in time for dinner, having come from Yorkshire in the morning—did you not, Mrs. Langham?’ and Mrs. Corbett addressed the knitting lady, anxious to draw her into conversation. She was busy at the moment counting the stitches of the heel of her stocking, but after a few seconds turned her head listlessly, and with a frozen smile assented; then, laying down her work, she held out her hands to the flame, bent forward, and said:

‘You are much better off in every way than we are in Yorkshire. Langham is a

hundred miles, I always say, from civilization.'

'Margaret,' said Mrs. Corbett to her younger niece, who came towards them at that moment, 'would you get a stool for Countess de Ferrin? and won't you have a cup of tea? Yes, Margaret, fetch some, please; and for Miss Byers, too. It is early in the afternoon, perhaps, to take it, but some of our people are going by the five o'clock express.'

'Thank you, but Miss Byers said we were going on to Lady Perceval's to tea.'

'Lady Perceval has a bad cold, and is unable, I think, to see anyone. I called there yesterday, and the servants told me she was not allowed to leave her room. But Sir Maurice is here somewhere; he was talking to me just now, and stupidly I forgot to ask him how she was. Margaret, would you ask Sir Maurice to come to me?' And the talkative lady moved her head backwards and forwards, endeavouring to find the person she sought amongst the group of young men.

Helen raised her eyes, and fixed them dreamily on a tall, fair moustached figure that crossed the room towards them, in obedience to Margaret's summons.

'Countess de Ferrin and Miss Byers,' said Mrs. Corbett, indicating Helen as she spoke, 'intended going to pay Lady Perceval a visit this afternoon. Is she well enough to see anyone?'

Sir Maurice bowed, accepting Mrs. Corbett's gesture as an introduction, and said :

'Alas, she is still kept a prisoner to her room. It is nothing, only a slight cold; but the doctor says she must take care of herself. You know how delicate her chest is.'

As Sir Maurice spoke he took a low chair, and sat down opposite the two ladies on the sofa.

'I am sorry for Lady Perceval, and sorry for myself too,' said Helen, the lisp of her foreign accent becoming distinctly audible, as it always did when she was shy. 'I hear you have a beautiful old place, and I have been looking forward very much to seeing it.'



‘My mother also is looking forward much to seeing you.’

At that moment Miss Byerswards them, intending to take Helène but hearing that Lady Perceval was well, she was persuaded by Mr. Gordon to stop and have tea at Deringham, and therefore all adjourned to the house where they were presently joined by the rest of the company.

Mr. Gordon, the artist, continued the discussion he had begun with the others.

‘I told Myles I did not think the efforts of his would ever do. The art of the present day will not consist in copying the unvarnished reality. You must go back to the old Greek for that. No drapery on his statues, and no metaphors when he talked about truth.’

‘I do not know about fine phrases,’ murmured Mr. Brotherton; ‘but I do not think there is too much of anything nowadays.’

‘Perhaps not, especially as

know how to draw, and so few poets how to express themselves.'

'He is Mr. Gordon, the R.A., you know,' whispered Margaret Corbett, who had seated herself beside Helen, and was amusing herself by making her pug Judy beg for biscuits.

The young woman gave a gasp, and looked up at the frescoes on the walls, wondering naïvely by what right he was entitled to lay down the law; and gratefully acknowledging the necessity he had recognised of draping the limbs of his figures.

Mr. Gordon, who was evidently very anxious to attract the attention of the pretty stranger, advanced to the tea-table close to her, and offered to help the lady of the house in pouring hot water on the tea. In doing so, however, he awkwardly tilted the urn over too much, and instead of putting it into the teapot, poured it over his own hand. The unaffected way in which he called out, and laying down the cup looked with an expression of distressed pain at the wounded member, was so funny that Helen,

catching Maurice Perceval's eye, could not help smiling. Luckily her untimely mirth was not noticed amidst the profuse offers of assistance that were made to Mr. Gordon by all the ladies surrounding him ; and by the time Mrs. Corbett had sat down on the sofa, having done everything she could for the benefit of the suffering artist, Maurice was able to ask Helen, in a tolerably steady and unconscious voice, 'if she did not think the house beautiful.'

'Yes,' rather dubiously. 'There seem to be very beautiful things in it.'

'What is your opinion of the frescoes?'

She looked up, glanced at Margaret Corbett, and said nothing.

'They are all portraits. The picture of Penelope and her maidens was supposed to be typical. That is a veritable piece of crewel embroidery, done while Carew was in India.'

'When he came home he objected, naturally, to the idea of the whole thing, and Gordon made use of the subject for this decoration. Isn't that it, Miss Corbett?' asked Maurice, talking across Helen.

‘I believe so;’ and Margaret, Maurice, and Helen got up to study the work of art in question more minutely.

‘How wonderful the vanity of you women is!’ said Maurice, lowering his voice as he addressed Helen. ‘This lady here in the corner, for whom, I believe, Miss Vane, the celebrated beauty, sat, fancied her hair, and so let it down her back, as you see. This one, Lady Carew, of whom we were speaking just now, fancied her figure, and you see the result. Is it any wonder that Carew objected when he came home? Vanity is, I think, the strongest influence in your lives. You do not mind being written about, talked about, and made notorious by the painter’s brush or the journalist’s pen, so long as the world calls you fair.’

Helen looked up quickly, while a flame of colour came into her pale cheeks.

‘I dislike generalizations,’ she said ; and, turning to Margaret, listened exclusively to the conventional jargon the girl had picked up like a parrot from those surrounding her,

and gazed with wonderment at the limp, sallow-faced men, and pink and white drapery pegs that reclined in impossible positions on marble benches and classical-shaped chairs.

‘I have heard Florence Corbett state,’ put in Maurice sarcastically, nothing daunted by the snub Helen had given him, ‘that the new school, of which Mr. Gordon is one of the apostles, is the re-echo of all that art has produced best up to now. You women are so fond of words. Anyone who talks big enough can lead you.’ This he said pointedly, evidently enjoying Helen’s annoyance. Then, lowering his voice, ‘It is rather fun to drop in here and see what goes on. Gordon stops up in his room all the morning, but at lunch-time he descends like a wolf on the fold; and the ladies, who have been amusing themselves until then, all endeavour to rise to his level and talk high art. If you wish to move in Deringham society, you must get a dictionary of eclectic expressions; you must buy yards of green cashmere and

roll yourself up in it ; and you must learn to play the violin, viola, or double bass.'

At that moment the unconscious Margaret, who was walking on in front, turned and said, as she pointed to a little cupboard that stood in a corner of the room :

'Do you care about old snuff-boxes, Countess de Ferrin? This is a very fine collection, I believe.'

'I am afraid I do not know much about them, but I saw a cupboard full of some Greek figures and vases as we came through the hall. I should like to see those, if we could slip out without making a fuss.'

'Yes, of course. My uncle would be delighted to find some one to appreciate his belongings.'

Helen and her companions had only been a few moments looking at the case, when they heard Mr. Corbett's voice behind them.

He had been seeing the Brothertons to their carriage, and was returning through the hall.

‘ You like these Greek things, do you, Countess de Ferrin? I got tired very soon of them, and wrote to my friend Jocelyn, in Sicily, not to send any more. You must go for one thing or another, and they don’t suit a Queen Anne house, that’s the fact.’

‘ I would not object to have them at Stourton,’ murmured Maurice.

‘ Bless me! I would, if I were you, rather possess the Royalist hat and spurs your great-great-grandfather wore at the battle of Naseby, that hang in the hall of Stourton, than all these gimcrack things.’

Coughing and panting as he spoke, the little man waddled along over the polished floor.

‘ Look at this Venetian glass, for instance; what do I care for it? Mr. Moore, the architect, told me it was the thing to have, and showed me a photograph of a collection he knew was for sale in Bologna. I paid five hundred pounds for it, and have never had the time to look at it. The upholsterer seems to have set it up rather nicely;’ and he pointed to a dark corner, where, on a

dozen shelves backed by gilt paper, stood some of those wonders of the glass-blower's art manufactured in Venice two hundred years before.

'What beautiful specimens!' said Helen, going forward and trying to see behind the glass doors.

'Shall I open the cabinet for you, Countess de Ferrin?'

'Thank you.'

'How lovely! Look at this dish. Doesn't it look as if all the opals and greys of an Italian sunset were imprisoned in it.'

And as the young woman spoke she held up a dish that was on one of the shelves.

Mr. Corbett, who seemed for the first time to appreciate his own belongings, said meditatively:

'It is very pretty, isn't it?'

'I suppose it is,' said Maurice, purposely cold because of Helen's enthusiasm.

'You have one of those Arabian flame-coloured plates among the glass. I know them so well; I have studied them professionally at the Cluny,' the young woman



went on, oblivious of the fact that Mr. Gordon and his 'suite' had followed them from the other room.

'I see you love beautiful things,' the artist said; 'and you used the word "professionally" just now. Might I ask if you are an artist?'

'Only to a very small extent, I am sorry to confess.'

'Surely you depreciate your own powers.'

Miss Amelia, who did not care about the turn the conversation was taking, began fidgeting to get away.

'You must come and dine with us one night this week,' Mrs. Corbett said, as they were going; 'the Countess de Ferrin too—all your party, in fact. Mr. Corbett has to speak at some agricultural dinner, I can't remember what date; I will let you know, however, and then we can fix an evening.'

'We shall be very happy, only I am sorry to say Mademoiselle de Ferrin talks of going away in a few days.'

'That will never do,' said Mr. Corbett, whose heart she had won by admiring his

possessions ; 'she must come up and 'have another look at the Venetian glass. What a nice little woman that is,' he added, as he waddled back coughing, having put Miss Amelia and Helen into the carriage.

'Rather stuck up, I think,' was Mrs. Corbett's criticism, walking with a shiver to the hall fireplace, where the rest of the circle had congregated.

'You don't think her pretty, do you ?' asked the eldest Miss Corbett of Mr. Gordon. 'I am so disappointed—I heard she was a beauty.'

'I think she is, Florence, decidedly pretty ; not quite like anyone one has seen before, her face is so full of expression, and she has such lovely eyes,' answered the younger sister.

'Too much expression for my taste,' volunteered Mrs. Langham, who was seated on an inlaid mother-of-pearl Turkish stool, that stood close to the fire ; 'did you see how she moved her hands about ? But what do you think of her, Sir Maurice ? you have said nothing as yet.'

Leaning forward, Mrs. Langham laid the stocking she was knitting on her lap, and turned towards Sir Maurice Perceval, who stood silently listening to the conversation going on around him.

‘I think she is rather affected, and displeasingly *un-English*.’

With a laugh at this observation, the party adjourned into the drawing-room.





## CHAPTER IV.

‘He may live without books—what is knowledge but grieving ?

He may live without hope—what is hope but deceiving ?

He may live without love—what is passion but pining ?

But where is the man that may live without dining ?’

‘**W**HAT an elaborate monogram!’ said Florence Corbett, superciliously taking up a grey-tinted letter that lay on the breakfast-table at Deringham, a few days after Miss Byers and Helen’s visit. ‘A coronet in silver and black, with an F and an M and an H intertwined. How it smells of white rose, too! It is from the Countess, evidently. Is she dining here to-morrow ?’

‘Yes,’ answered Mrs. Corbett, to whom the question was addressed. ‘She and Miss Byers will dine here. Mr. Byers and Mary begged to be excused, on the plea of having caught bad colds; it must exercise their ingenuity to invent excuses.’

‘Who are you going to ask to meet Countess de Ferrin, aunt?’ asked the youngest Miss Corbett.

‘We might have Mr. and Mrs. Brotherton, and Mr. and Miss Gibson, and the Percevals—that will make us sixteen with those we have stopping in the house.’

‘Lady Perceval will most likely not come.’

‘Suppose she doesn’t. I hope he will,’ responded the mistress of the house.

‘When you write, you had better say so;’ and the girl, as she spoke, turned with a piece of holly in her hand, preparatory to putting it in one of the flower-vases.

‘By-the-bye, ought we not to ask the Brothertons’ niece? She is pretty, and will make another lady; and Dr. Clark, too—he is such a nice old fellow, and has always

plenty to say for himself; and above all, we must not forget Mr. Ffrench, the curate.'

'My dear Margaret, it seems to me you want to ask the whole of Stourton!'

'It is only three additional; and if Lady Perceval doesn't come, we shall be eighteen—not one too many.'

On the evening of the day of the dinner, the Deringham dining-room, with its dark oak-panelled and tapestried walls, made a fit background to the showy tablecloth, brilliant glass, and exotic flowers, round which Mr. and Mrs. Corbett's guests were seated.

Helen, dressed in white, her hair rolled high on her head, and a row of amber beads round her neck, was as pleasant to look at as the white azaleas on the table. On her right hand was seated the master of the house, who had taken her in.

'There's not a ha'porth of real rank amongst them,' he had said to his wife, before dinner; 'so you had better let me take in the French Countess. She is a nice bright little woman.'

‘Real rank, my dear! What do you mean? don’t you know that her husband was one of the well-known De Ferrins?’

‘I dessay, I dessay.’

‘What does she mean by her profession?’ and Mr. Corbett turned and faced his wife.

‘She earns her livelihood by her brush, and has been taken up, I can tell you, by some of the best people in London.’

‘She seems to me clever enough, and pretty too; but remember, she is a widow, and might have a history.’

‘What can that matter? we have no sons to marry.’

‘You know best, my dear; do what you think fit;’ and Mr. Corbett vanished, coughing violently, his usual refuge when wishing to avoid discussion.

Certainly Helen, as she sat at the dinner-table that night, turning her graceful head to Mr. Corbett on the right, and then to Maurice Perceval her neighbour on the left, looked as if generations of chivalrous gentlemen and refined gentlewomen had

left her that bearing and air, as an heirloom.

Mrs. Brotherton, the clergyman's wife, was heard to remark to Mr. Gordon, that she reminded her of the portraits of the Empress Josephine, or of those women seated in a chair on the top of clocks she had seen in Paris.

Mrs. Corbett was taken down to dinner by Mr. Gibson, M.P. for the borough. While Mr. Brotherton, who mumbled something inaudible to his plate at the beginning of dinner, which was supposed to be grace, sat on the other side. Florence Corbett was seated opposite, with Mrs. Gordon beside her. Margaret had been allotted to Maurice Perceval, but finding him absorbed, had, after a time, turned to talk to young Hopkins, one of the nondescript men who were stopping in the house. Helen was prepared to enjoy herself. She had been leading a very quiet humdrum life for some time, and the scent of the flowers, the sound of the voices round the table, the bright lights, all combined to exhilarate her spirits.



She admired the handsome refined face and the courteous friendly manner of her neighbour on the left ; and after doing duty and making conversation with Mr. Corbett for some time, she at last yielded to her inclination, and leaning back in her chair, talked exclusively with Maurice Perceval.

‘ This is your first visit to this part of the world, is it not?’ he asked.

‘ Yes, and I am delighted with Stourton. What a pretty place!’

‘ I am glad you think so, and hope you will honour it with a visit soon again. When are you seriously thinking of going?’

‘ The beginning of next week. The Byers’ are so kind and hospitable, I think they wish me to stop for ever; but I must go back to my mother, and to my work.’

‘ To your mother! Is she in England?’

‘ Yes, in London.’

‘ And your work—what do you do?’

‘ Anything I can to make money.’

‘ Dear me! What a mercy to meet some one here who has not got twenty

thousand a year! You are privileged! Poor dear Mr. Corbett! the one unpardonable sin in his eyes was, I thought, poverty.'

'Not, evidently, in my case ; but let us change the subject. Tell me about the people here.'

'The people round the table, you mean?'

'Yes. I want to hear who they are.'

'You know who your opposite neighbour is. You met Mr. Gordon here before.'

'Now tell me, who is the young man in a red coat and monogram buttons, next but one to you?'

'That is young Hopkins, son of the Earl of Devonport, evidently much affected by Miss Margaret Corbett. Swagger, isn't it, coming in a red coat!'

'Do you think so? I rather like it. It is a good bit of colour in the landscape; and Miss Corbett seems to think it all right.'

Maurice turned to look at the couple for

a moment, and then glanced round at the other guests.

‘Ffrench, the curate, has come in scarlet too, I see.’ The person named was a fair-haired man, with protruding ears, and a painful habit of blushing, who was placed on the other side of the table. Having had no lady to take down, he had sat gazing at Helen with a persistency which amused Sir Maurice, but of which she seemed quite unconscious.

‘Ffrench was a college friend of mine, and I assisted at a tragedy in his life. Nobody but I knew at the time. I saw him marry the woman he loved to another man.’

‘Perform the service, you mean; how sad!’ and Helen, as she listened, could not resist a smile.

‘You do not seem to feel as acute a compassion as I should wish, for my poor little friend.’

‘Forgive me for smiling,’ she answered; ‘he looks so small and fair, I can hardly connect him with a great tragedy.’

‘I can see you are one of those people

who expect to meet Moses and John the Baptist at every dinner they go to. I am afraid I can hardly satisfy you in the company present; for I do not think Mr. Corbett would approve of the company here, and I am sure that they could not eat of the locusts and wild honey.

Helen thought she detected a certain amount of sarcasm in the tone of the melancholic voice, and was on the defensive immediately.

'I never knew before I was so difficult to please: if she would really be kind, I am rather afraid of superior people. I like the ordinary run.'

'What do you call the ordinary run?'

'People who are not too self-satisfied to make themselves agreeable.'

'You are severe; but I do not think judging from appearances that even an eventuality seldom improves a soul.'

'Yes, it has, several times.'

'Since you came to England?'

'Yes, since I came to England. I remember the first time I met Mr. H.

London. I was taken down by a young officer—a guardsman, they told me afterwards—as if that were excuse enough for anything.’

Maurice laughed uneasily.

‘What did he do?’

‘He abused Frenchmen, said they could not fight, that they were no good against a handful of English soldiers, etc., etc. And then when he discovered his mistake, instead of being sorry, he leant back in his chair and did not speak for the rest of the dinner.’

‘What ought he to have done?’

‘He ought to have acknowledged his stupidity, and begged my pardon, of course.’

‘Then he was only a guardsman, you see, and not responsible for his actions.’

‘I believe they are very foolish generally.’

Again Maurice laughed.

‘I hope you will forgive me then, Countess de Ferrin, whatever I do, for I am one of that ill-fated order who incurred your displeasure.’

Helen blushed to the roots of her hair. It had never occurred to her for one instant that such a contingency were possible, and was now all the more upset.

‘No, it is not possible!’

‘Why not?’

‘Because you are too clever.’

Her companion laughed all the more.

‘You are only making it worse as you go on. Now, what will you do to make amends to me for my hurt feelings? Will you tell me you are sorry, or will you lean back in your chair and say nothing?’

‘I am really *very* sorry.’

‘Will you let me make my own terms with you, then?’

All his careless indolence had disappeared in his enjoyment of her discomfiture. As he leaned forward Helen for the first time saw the firm clean-cut mouth which was now smiling, and the strong square chin which spoke of more strength of will than she at first imagined lay behind the handsome face.

‘I will not ask you to beg my pardon,

but hope you will reconsider your verdict with regard to my profession, and that you will make yourself as agreeable for the rest of dinner as you possibly can.'

'But suppose I am obliged to talk to Mr. Corbett?'

'I will leave it outstanding, then, as a debt to be paid at any time.'

After this passage of arms they got on better, discussing art, politics, and people. When, in answer to Helen's inquiries, he mentioned his mother's name, there was a gleam in his soft lazy eyes that prejudiced her considerably in his favour; then he talked about Stourton Court, and told her she must come and see it.'

'Your people were Royalists as well as mine in the old days?'

'Yes; I am glad to say they always fought on the right side.'

'What do you mean by the right side?'

'For their king and their country.'

'Do you think that is always the right side?'

‘Yes, and so do you. You may talk Liberalism as much as you like. I read the speech that you made at the meeting last night, and carried away the impression that you were not sincere. Nothing is more displeasing than sentimental Radicalism, especially when people are thorough Conservatives at heart. I understand it when it is done for ambitious motives, but in your case I should think there was nothing of the kind to influence you.’

Irritated by the look of amusement on his face, she defiantly turned the rings on her slender finger, and looking straight into the eyes bent on her, went on :

‘I think a man must be very young and very inexperienced to believe in a possible equality for all classes.’

‘I assure you I should be sorry to pay you so poor a compliment as to believe in your possible equality with me, for instance. You must have misunderstood my speech, or are thinking of Jones’s. Besides, supposing I did, it shows how little you know of my sex if you believe all we say.’



‘I suppose I *was* mistaken in believing you in earnest.’

‘It is an argument in favour, certainly, of the truth of Talleyrand’s saying, “Beware of first impressions.”’

‘I never did agree with Talleyrand,’ she answered testily. ‘First impressions are always correct.’

‘I am glad to say that my experience contradicts yours. I can recall many a charming face and musical voice which delighted me at first, but thought of afterwards with dread; and many a rough, ugly fellow whom I have learnt to trust and depend on.’

First impressions seemed to be becoming a dangerous subject, and, like a skilful fencer parrying the thrust, whether intentional or unintentional, she changed the subject.

‘What do you think of Mr. Gordon?’

‘What! of Mr. Gordon as a first impression?’

‘Yes.’

‘I am afraid I am not a fair judge. I do

not care for artistic people, especially that class of artists who, as George Eliot says, reverse Peter's visionary lesson, and call all art but their own common and unclean.'

At that moment Mr. Corbett addressed Helen, and, much to Maurice's disgust, she turned and began an animated conversation with him. Margaret was completely occupied with young Hopkins, so Maurice found himself out in the cold, and hailed with pleasure the nod he saw exchanged between Mrs. Corbett and Helen, followed by the noise of the pushing back of chairs and the rustle of silk and satin as the ladies left the room.

After they had partaken of coffee in the drawing-room, the Miss Corbetts sat down to the piano and sang and played; and then, after whispering for a second or two with Miss Byers, Mrs. Corbett crossed the room to where Helen sat, and asked her if she would not sing. She consented with a smile, and, laying down her cup on a small table near her, walked to the piano. After letting her fingers wander softly up

With a smile she walked away from the piano, where, at Mrs. Corbett's request, her place was immediately taken by Margaret Corbett.

For one moment all stood courteously silent; then one of the gentlemen in the doorway turned to the other, and made some remark about the Liberal meeting the night before; his companion answered, and soon the conversation amongst them became general, almost completely drowning the sound of the music. Dr. Clark came over to where Helen was sitting. She spoke to him with more interest than she had ever bestowed upon him before, in consequence of the conversation with Miss Byers. His kindly eyes looked over a pair of spectacles that were hooked over his ears, and held by that means on the end of his nose; his head was perfectly bald, except for a fringe of grey hair that lay low down on his collar. When she knew him better, Helen remarked that he would sit for long periods at a time passing his hand backwards and forwards over the polished surface of the

bald part, supporting his right arm with his left. She often wondered that continual scratching did not take off the polish.

His hands were bony and freckled, and always stained with the drugs he used. In spite of the rough exterior, however, he piqued himself on being a *gourmet*.

‘What a good dinner, wasn’t it? Wonderfully good cook Corbett has; capital wine, too! I am of Wellington’s opinion, you know, Countess de Ferrin, that a good dinner is necessary to good generalship. I remember my friend Greg telling me that at Waterloo, Thornton the cook, while he was preparing the Duke’s dinner, was advised to run away; the only answer he made -was, “I have had the honour of serving his Grace these six years, and I never knew him yet miss a dinner he had ordered; and I don’t think he will to-day.” He was right, quite right; the Duke returned and ate his dinner. Wonderful man! As he used often to say to my friend Greg, “I have a square head; always put your faith in a square head.”’ And the

doctor, smiling, passed his hand over his own. 'But it was a good dinner, wasn't it, Countess?'

'I am afraid I am not much of a judge.'

'Ah, low feeding and high thinking—that's your precept, is it? Not a bad one either. I would have less practice, I can tell you, if all my patients would do the same. Then you were beside Perceval; nice fellow, Maurice. A guardsman with views and opinions is a very rare species—indeed so rare, that when my friend Byers first came to settle here, he would not believe in it, any more than he does in the sea-serpent. I remember his observation to me, when I first asked him to call at Stourton—"No more of your sea-serpent yarns for me!" but he believes in it now, and indeed I think has as great an opinion of Perceval as I have.'

'Take care,' said Helen, bending forward and laying her fan on Dr. Clark's arm. He turned with a start, and saw Maurice standing close to him.

‘I can see you were talking about me; and as listeners never hear good of themselves, perhaps I had better go away.’

‘We were saying nothing very bad, were we?—only regretting that you, the future Conservative member for Stourton, could lend your name to the Liberals to use as they like;’ and Dr. Clark with a chuckle pushed out his chair, to admit of Sir Maurice joining their circle.

‘I have no doubt that the Countess de Ferrin was very severe. She has already enlightened me as to her opinion of my profession and political opinions. I hardly dare mention the request, therefore, which I have been commissioned to make: can you guess what it is?’ and Maurice, as he spoke, bent towards Helen.

‘I think I can; but at whose request do you come?’

‘At that of the general public. If you are tired, please do not scruple to say so.’

‘I am quite rested now; I will be very happy to sing again. What would you like—French or English?’ As she spoke, she

caught Mrs. Corbett's eyes fixed on her, and rising quickly, walked to the piano.

The song she chose was an old-fashioned one of Béranger's, with a plaintive refrain. Before the first verse was over, there was complete silence in the room—it would have been difficult to say why. The voice was not a fine one, and the execution in no way remarkable; but the expression she threw into it proved her at once to be gifted with the power of appealing to her audience. Had it not been for the exhaustion apparent when she had done, the audience would unanimously have insisted on a repetition. Mercifully for her sake, the servant at that moment announced Miss Byers's and Mr. Brotherton's carriages.

The moon shone clear and cold on the frosty landscape as they drove home. A mist, however, soon came over the windows, and Helen, unable to see anything more, leant back and again listened to what she called one of Miss Byers's carriage lectures.

'How overdone everything is in that house! I thought we never should have

finished dinner; and really it is too absurd all those men and women upon the walls. I heard Miss Gibson telling them that she thought the painting as fine as some of the Italian masters'; upon which Miss Corbett, turning to Maurice Perceval, suggested that he ought to illustrate Deringham poetically as Mr. Gordon had artistically. Sir Maurice turned away with a laugh, and said he had never written a poem in his life; and to do justice to Deringham and its inmates "would require an epic in twelve books." A nice clever young man that, and as courteous to an old woman like me as if I were young and beautiful like you, my dear; a thing one rarely finds nowadays. Such a contrast to that ridiculous painting-man, who told me to "use constant sight and fervent love," if I wished to "appreciate art in the highest sense." Did you ever hear such stuff? Miss Corbett plays so into his hands. Upon my word, I think that girl gets more affected every day. Margaret's the pearl of the party. Pretty, too,



don't you think? I wonder if it will ever be a match between her and Maurice. It would be a good thing for both parties; but then, I find those things that are good for both parties never come off in this work-a-day world of ours. By-the-bye, he asked us to go up and see his mother soon. She is well enough to come downstairs now, and expresses great anxiety to make your acquaintance. We might go there on Monday.'

The fire was crackling on the hearth, and an armchair was comfortably standing opposite it, when Helen entered her bedroom on her return that night. After getting on her dressing-gown and putting her feet into a comfortable pair of slippers, she sank into the chair, and gave herself up to a tranquil reverie. The little travelling-clock on her chimney-piece struck twelve o'clock, but still she made no signs of retiring to rest.

Visions of the youth she had passed in her native land rose up before her, and she could not help mentally comparing the

difference between her life then and her life now.

She remembered one day, years before, when she was eighteen, her mother walking into her little attic bedroom, high up on the fifth story of an old house in the Faubourg St. Germain, and telling her that the Count de Ferrin had made her an offer of marriage, representing at the same time the brilliancy of the *partie*. Helen could still recall the feeling of suffocation that rose in her throat as she listened to her mother recapitulating the advantages that would accrue to them by the acceptance of the old Count's hand. She remembered sitting down on the edge of her bed; letting the frock she was making for Berthe the concierge's child's doll drop in her lap, while she gazed open-mouthed at her mother. The only men who had as yet entered into her life were her cousin Henri, who had made love to her, and given her bonbonnières; and this Count de Ferrin, an old gentleman whom she connected with a gold-headed cane, white hair, and an irreproachably cut

coat, who talked of Henri V. as 'Notre souverain,' and the existing government as 'Tout ça'—to look upon him as a husband was impossible ; and besides, if she cared for anyone it was for Henri, with his black moustaches and epaulettes.

'But, my dear child, Henri has nothing but his pay. It is out of the question,' Madame de Carrel had answered.

Age has more tenacity of purpose than youth ! One day, hardly knowing how it came about, Helen found herself folding up Berthe's doll's clothes in her drawer, and working away at her own wedding-dress instead.

Then the quiet tranquil life at the old castle in Lorraine rose before her eyes. It was a solitary place, with terraces looking down upon a valley which cut it off from the outside world ; a place where you might pass days without seeing any living thing but the sheep grazing on the hill-side, or without hearing any living thing but the birds singing in the trees that bordered the stream. She lived a monoto-

nous, colourless life, undisturbed by the fever of hope or the trials of disappointment, and was not unhappy ; her husband adored her, and devoted himself to the worship of her 'eighteen years.' Madame de Carrel came now and then, and Helen had always plenty to do with her household and her garden. Although not a highly educated woman, she spent long happy hours in the library of the château, reading the chivalrous stories of the De Ferrins' ancestors, diversified by the 'Lives of the Saints,' and volumes of old French poetry.

This tranquil life went on for one or two years, until one day suddenly her husband was taken ill—'failure of the action of the heart,' they said; and ere she had time to say good-bye or feel once more the pressure of his kind, sustaining hand, he was gone for ever.

'Ah! dear, dear! what a curious thing life is—a kaleidoscope full of changes and chances!'

And stretching herself with a sigh, the dreamer rose.

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“Through those dark gates across the wild  
That no man knows. Indeed I love thee ; come,  
Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself.”

By-the-bye, where did I leave my book?’ and she looked round. ‘I believe it’s in the drawing-room. I must get it, otherwise Mr. Byers will question me to-morrow, and I shall know nothing.’

Gathering her dressing-gown round her, she passed out into the passage, over the squares that the moonlight threw through the unshuttered windows, and downstairs to the green and gold drawing-room. There lay the volume of Tennyson’s ‘Poems.’ She took it up, and was going to leave the room, when her eye was caught by the red and gold cover of the book dear to Miss Byers’s heart, ‘The Peerage.’ With a methodical determination she would have laughed at in anyone else, she laid down her candle and the Tennyson, and taking up the book, opened it, and read :

‘Perceval, Sir Maurice, of Stourton Court, ——shire, born in so and so, son of so and so.’

The name had a distinct, long-moustached, fair-haired personality for her now.

‘It is curious,’ she thought, resting her head on her hand, ‘but I seem to have seen him somewhere before. His figure, his face, awakened in me immediately a memory — a *ressouvenir*. Where could I have met him? or am I only dreaming?’





## CHAPTER V.

‘In the screening time  
Of purple blossoms, when the petals crowd  
And softly crush like cherub cheeks in heaven,  
Who thinks of greenly withered fruit and worms?’

**D**ERINGHAM lay on one side of the village, Stourton on the other. On Monday, therefore, William proceeded at his usual stately pace down the High Street, passing the church with its graveyard and yew-trees, over the bridge that crossed the canal, and up the hill that stretched on the other side, from the top of which the Court could be seen, with its round gables and white mullioned windows, embosomed in dark brown woods.

It was a bright March day. The sun shone warm on Helen’s face, and threw a

haze over the landscape. Ascending the hill, the road skirted a steep bank, which Miss Byers informed Helen Dr. Clark had declared to be an old Roman fortification; but she added, with a laugh :

‘ I am afraid we none of us believe in Dr. Clark’s military knowledge beyond the Duke of Wellington.’

Making a sudden bend, it then passed a finger-post, and came upon a wooden paling in front of a belt of fir-trees, which Miss Byers, as cicerone, again informed her companion was the boundary of the estate. They had a long drive through the park; and even Helen, in her ignorance, could see the difference between the park at Deringham and this. Reeds grew where they listed, rank grass flourished in the uplands, while the carriage-springs were severely tested by the ruts in the roadway. The house lay in a hollow, surrounded by rising waves of green lawn, broken here and there by a hoary old oak-tree that stood raising its leafless arms to heaven, or a stately group of elms, amid the branches of which



the mist hung white. Close behind the house a wide-spreading ilex-tree threw its shadow on the ground, leaving brown patches under its branches where the grass was faded.

To the front everything was bleak and bare, and driving round the sweep that led down the hill, they could see the gables and chimney-stacks standing isolated and gaunt against the winter sky. Helen observed that only half the house was inhabited, for the blinds were down along the top story of the side towards her. The front iron gate was opened to them by a shepherd in a white coat and gaiters, who was leisurely sauntering past with a pipe in his mouth; whilst no powdered footman, as at Deringham, answered their summons. A neat little maid informed them that Lady Perceval was at home, and ushered them into a stately hall, with groined roof and oak-panelled walls. At one end the carved mantelpiece ascended to the ceiling, above the aperture of an open fireplace decorated with brass dogs; at the other stood a carved

oaken press, with a date and initials painted on the shield above. Through the wooden trellis-work opposite the doorway, glimpses could be caught of the old staircase, with the china plates and jars that lined its wainscoting, and the stained-glass windows in which the arms of the Percevals that had flourished since the Conquest were quartered.

All was imposing and dignified, but Helen shivered as she saw that no fire burnt in the open fireplace, and that the sole covering of the wide expanse of floor was a few Eastern rugs.

‘Lady Perceval is in the south drawing-room,’ said the girl. ‘This way, please, ma’am. Mind the step.’

As she spoke, she opened a door in one corner of the hall, leading them into a passage that was inadequately lit by a stained-glass window over an entrance at the other end. Miss Byers seemed to know her way, but Helen was obliged to watch the gleam of the girl’s white cap to steer hers. She saw it stop, waver, bend down;

a door to the left was thrown open, and a *portière* was pushed back.

The screens and curtains of the room which they entered looked as though they had been put up to shut out the world of cold and discomfort outside; the occupant, who stepped down to receive them from a raised settee that ran round the projecting window, gave no impression of a person who knew the signification of circumscribed means. In the carriage of Lady Perceval's head and the gesture of her outstretched hand, Helen saw immediately the likeness between mother and son.

There was the same expression of refinement, the same graceful ease of manner; but in Lady Perceval the mouth had hardened, and there were lines on the brow and round the eyes—lines of pride, lines of care, which had not yet been graven on the younger face. Her head moved with a slight palsy, and the strong square chin trembled as she spoke, rendering the likeness more pathetic.

'I am so delighted to see you,' she said,

laying a hand on Miss Byers's arm and leading her to a seat beside the fireplace. 'And the Countess de Ferrin, too. How good of her to come and cheer up an old woman like me! My son, when he returned from the Corbetts the other night, told me he had met you.' And the old lady held out her other hand to Helen. 'You sang, he said, very charmingly. I am so sorry I could not see you before. These wretched easterly winds soon knock me up; but now that I have got through my annual cold, I shall hope to hold communion with the outer world. What stay are you making?'

'I am afraid I must leave next week,' replied Helen.

'Next week—that will never do.'

'I tell her so,' put in Amelia.

'I never heard of such a thing. We don't so often get an addition to our society, that we can afford to let you go. What is taking you away so suddenly? Ah, by-the-bye, yes, my son mentioned that you had relations in London—a mother, I

think—tell me about her!—and that you had work of some kind.'

Lady Perceval bent forward, and putting up her old-fashioned gold-rimmed eyeglass, looked at Helen with that air of superfluous interest so often assumed by women of the world in converse with their neighbours.

Helen was slightly overwhelmed at this knowledge of her surroundings, and said diffidently:

'My mother, of course, feels lonely without me.'

'I can quite understand that, and can warn you beforehand that she will take it quite for granted that you should give up all your enjoyment in the country to please her. We mothers become very selfish as we grow old. But we must get Miss Byers to persuade you to come down again in the spring.'

'We hope to be able to do so,' interposed Amelia.

'You ought to come in May or June, when the leaves are on the trees, and then

we can show you Stourton in the full perfection of its beauty.'

'I think the house now as pretty as anything I ever saw. It reminds me of some of our French châteaux.'

Helen, as she spoke, leant back in her chair, and glanced out of the window and round the room.

'I love the place, but alas! we are swamped by our finer neighbours. What did you think of Deringham? It is full of beautiful things, is it not?'

'I have only seen the house twice—once when Miss Byers took me in the afternoon, and another time when we dined there.'

'My son, then, happened to meet you both times?'

'Yes, I think he did. I am afraid my education is not advanced enough to enable me to appreciate the decorations.'

'I am so glad to hear that you have the courage to confess it. What do you think, Amelia?' and Lady Perceval turned to Miss Byers.

‘I can only echo what my brother says, and he is very severe about it. He declares, too, he cannot cope with Miss Corbett and the people they have there, when they begin to talk high art; but that is the spirit of the age. One never meets a nice stupid girl now who can hem dusters and work cross-stitch; they are *all* a great deal too clever for me;’ and Miss Byers brushed energetically some imaginary dust off her dress. ‘*All*, that is to say, but Margaret Corbett—Margaret would make a charming wife for any man.’

The last words seemed to Helen to be said with intention.

‘Yes,’ responded Lady Perceval quietly. ‘I think Margaret Corbett is very nice, so unaffected and modest; but Mr. Corbett is not quite—quite—you know. Now is he?’

Miss Byers smiled primly.

‘Maurice declares that if a man knows how to talk and behave like a gentleman, I would forgive him murder. I don’t think I carry my love of refinement so far

as that; but I cannot bear to see people parade their money. The youngest girl, though, as you say, is very nice—and perhaps, after all, it is a case of the “fox and sour grapes.” It is annoying to find your butcher and baker bowing as low to these folk, who have been here about half a dozen years, as they do to my son, whose grandfather, three centuries ago, was a power in the place.’

Lady Perceval, as she spoke, pulled up her black silk mittens with an irritable gesture.

‘Yes, things are very different here now,’ interpolated Miss Byers, with a sigh, ‘even to what they were in my dear father’s time. Why, I can remember—and I dare say you can too, Lady Perceval—when one could go to Wilson’s and order the sirloin for Sunday’s dinner on Tuesday. Seeing it hang there every day, one began to feel a vested interest and pride in it before Saturday came. How can you do that now, with these men-cooks coming and taking all they want?’



‘Quite true; such people next door make one feel so much poorer. Ah! sometimes I sigh for the flesh-pots. I never like to see young souls cramped by petty and sordid cares, and should like my son to have money enough to do justice to the old house. You would then find, turning to Helen as she spoke, that it would not suffer by comparison with any place in the county. But you must not think I am depreciating our neighbours—they are kindness itself to us; indeed, Maurice is out hunting to-day on a horse lent him by Mr. Corbett. He is most goodnatured in that way; everyone stopping in the house can have a mount when he chooses. Lord Hopkins injured one of his valuable hunters seriously the other day, I heard; and really, considering he is Master of the Hounds and has any number of horses of his own, I think it rather a shame he should take Mr. Corbett’s. By-the-bye, have you seen Mrs. Brotherton lately, Amelia?’

‘Yes; I met her a few days ago in a great state of excitement about the Bishop’s visit.

Both ladies laughed, and carried on a low-voiced conversation for a little time on local topics, in which Helen did not join. She was thinking of what Lady Perceval had said just now of the Corbetts, and contrasting in her mind's eye this dim picturesque room, with its book-lined walls lit with the rays of the afternoon sun, and the crudely-coloured, over-decorated Deringham drawing-room; and felt that she breathed a different atmosphere. Not that there was any more liberality or breadth of vision here, but there was certainly more distinction.

She became conscious of the conversation of her companions, as she heard Lady Perceval say: 'Yes, a very pretty girl—plays so nicely, too. Have you heard Mrs. Brotherton's niece play the harmonium in church, Countess de Ferrin? No; though, of course, you are a Roman Catholic, being French and Legitimist.'

Again Helen smiled at the knowledge displayed of her peculiarities and opinions.

'Yes, I am a Catholic; but it does not

prevent my going to the Protestant Church.'

'I told her you had Roman Catholic service every Sunday in the chapel attached to the house,' said Amelia; 'only, as the Bishop preaches next Sunday morning, I thought she would like to hear him.'

'If you come to service here, you must relinquish that pleasure,' said the old lady; 'for Mr. O'Callaghan, our priest, can only get over in the morning. We have such a pretty little chapel. In the old days, all the Percevals were Catholics. I am the first Protestant; and you will forgive me for saying so, Countess de Ferrin, but it would be a sad day for me if they ever reverted to the old faith. My son, however, is not bigoted either way. Would you like to come and see the chapel?'

'Of all things,' said Helen; and rising, she put on her fur tippet and took her muff.

'You need not accompany us unless you like, Amelia. You must have seen it so often.'

'Oh, I should like to.'

'I will ring for the key, then; and mean-

time, come with me and I will show you the most interesting portions of the house. I know every tradition and every ghost-story connected with it—for of course I need not tell you we have a ghost.' And ringing the bell, Lady Perceval walked across the room.

'They tell me it is not right to live on this side of the house, in consequence of damp and dry-rot; but I have done so for years, and have never felt any bad effects. I only hope the last years of my life may be gladdened by a sight of that sweep of park, with its old elm and oak trees. Whenever there is a ray of sunlight in the day, it shines in at these windows; and the first snowdrops and crocuses peep out here—look at them now, how they encircle the grey walls with their golden band!' And she leant forward as she spoke, and pointed to a row of purple and yellow flowers, some of which were lying open, others bent and withered. 'They are going off already; but it is the inside of the house, not the outside, I want to show you. This,'

drawing back the curtains that hung between the two rooms, is the second south drawing-room; that door which you see in the corner, with the brass bolt, leads to the spiral staircase and up to the haunted room. I have been guilty, when I am sitting alone here at night, of getting up and gently fastening that bolt, so as to make sure of not being invaded. There is a sliding panel, too; and Lady Perceval pushed one of the oak panels aside, displaying a small cupboard to view. 'They say a Royalist was hidden in this room once, and had his supper put there every night. Poor man! I hope, for his sake, all these portraits were not here then; they are enough to give anyone a nightmare.'

Certainly it was a wonderful collection. There were ladies fat and ladies thin; ladies who looked as if their drapery had been tied on with a broken guitar-string (like the wig of the singing-master of our youth), and ladies who looked as if their dresses had been nailed on with tin-tacks.

'Who is that?' said Helen, walking up

to the portrait of a handsome, dark-looking boy that hung above the old slate chimney-piece.

‘That was one of the descendants of the illegitimate branch of the family.’

Helen started.

‘Don’t be shocked. My husband’s uncle went to Italy, and there fell in love with an Italian countess, and ran away with her. They came back here, but the old priest denounced them when they arrived, and refused to have anything to do with the offspring. Poor things! a curse certainly rested on them, as you can imagine. This boy was a thorough *vaurien*. There was a girl, too, but she ran away in consequence of her mother’s cruelty. She went to Italy, and married there. You remember her, Amelia? She and her daughter Laura were here one summer.’

‘Yes, I remember—a beautiful creature;’ and Amelia put on her spectacles as she spoke. ‘She is married since, isn’t she?’

‘Yes; she married an American mil-

lionaire in Rome. To tell you the truth, it was rather a relief to me. I was always afraid Maurice would fall in love with her. I know they philandered and sentimentalized in Italy; but it never would have done. We must have left the old place long ago if he had married a girl without a penny like that — a first cousin, too. But here I am taking you into all the family confidences, Countess de Ferrin;’ and the old lady, as she spoke, laid her hand on Helen’s, and pointed to another portrait. ‘This will interest you much more. That is the lady who haunts the house. She also fell under the displeasure of the Church; I can’t exactly tell you why, but it is her ghost that appears at the window of the room above this. The servants say she also walks up and down the passages at night. Dear, dear, dear!’ added the old lady, with a sigh; ‘so many dreams—so many hopes lie dead and buried in every corner of the old place.’

Then, seeing Helen again hesitated opposite another portrait of a dignified-looking

man in a martial cloak, with two or three medals on his breast, she said gently:

‘That was my husband. He was a soldier like my son;’ and passing on, they left the room.

After going up steps into one room, and steps down into another, they passed along a stone passage and across a moss-grown courtyard on their way to the chapel. There the little maid-servant met them with the key, and they entered a pillared, brown-raftered apartment, with benches up the middle, and a lace-hung altar on which stood a statue of the Virgin and Child, surrounded by vases of artificial flowers. Helen never knew why that moment was so vividly impressed on her memory, but years after she saw, as in a dream, the diapers of colours thrown by the painted window on the right of the altar; the bit of sky and tiled roof, of which she could get a peep through the square panes underneath; the worm-eaten old pew; the very drops of wax that had fallen on the stool where she knelt and said a prayer:



while through all her memories would creep the subtle smell of incense that lingered in the air.

As she rose and walked out to join Lady Perceval and Miss Byers, she noticed pinned to the door exhortations to the faithful to offer up prayers for the souls of the Roman Catholics of other communities, and notices of masses that were to be said for the souls of those that had died within the year. Her eye caught the name of Laura Marchesa di Guardia. She remembered the 'Laura' Lady Perceval had spoken about.

'I will come up to service to-morrow if I may,' she said to Mrs. Perceval, on bidding her good-bye.

'Do, dear, by all means. I shall not be here, as I must attend the parish church in the morning; but introduce yourself to Mr. O'Callaghan, the priest. You will find him charming.'

By the time they quitted the old house to go home, the shadows were lengthening, and the sun threw a golden light over the fields, making everything look ghostly and

unreal. It seemed to Helen as if the old house and the chapel and everything she had seen were portions of a dream. As they passed out of the lodge-gate, on the stone pillars of which was emblazoned the Perceval shield, with the motto 'Sans Tache,' the clatter of horses' hoofs sounded on the road in front of them. They soon recognised the two Miss Corbetts, accompanied by Sir Maurice Perceval, young Lord Hopkins, and Mr. Corbett. On seeing the carriage, the party slackened pace, and the girls came forward to speak to Amelia and Helen. They looked bright and handsome in tight-fitting brown habits, but were both splashed to the knees, while the gentlemen's top-boots and white breeches were brown with mud.

'We have had such a splendid run with the harriers,' Margaret Corbett said. 'It is delightful to get some hunting again after the frost.'

'I have no doubt it was most enjoyable,' answered Miss Byers, 'but I am afraid, my

dear child, I can hardly enter into your raptures.'

'They gave us a spin of twenty minutes across the finest bit of country in ——shire,' put in Mr. Corbett, panting asthmatically behind. 'It was as much as I could do to keep pace with them—wasn't it, Margaret?'

Maurice had meantime ridden round to Helen's side of the carriage. She could not help thinking how radiant he looked, and how lightly the home-cares Lady Perceval had talked of sat on his shoulders.

'You have been to see my mother, I suppose,' he said, bending forward. 'It is a quaint old place, isn't it?'

'Yes; I was delighted with it. I promised to come and say my prayers there next Sunday.'

'Surely it's too far for you to walk? Let me see, from Maplewood Lodge, it's at the very least two miles, and two miles back. You will be quite knocked up.'

'Dear me, no. I should like it.'

'Did I hear you say, Countess de Ferrin,

that you were going to Stourton chapel on Sunday?' asked Margaret Corbett, across Miss Byers, having evidently been listening to what Maurice and Helen were saying. 'If you are, do let me accompany you. I have so often wished to see Roman Catholic mass.'

'I shall be delighted ; but, remember, the Bishop is preaching at Mr. Brotherton's church on Sunday.'

'Yes, I know; but I would rather come to Stourton with you, if I may.'

'Certainly.'

'Shall I fetch you? it is rather far to walk.'

'That would be the very thing,' put in Maurice. 'Then you could walk home.'

Helen nodded acquiescence, and Maurice went on :

'I cannot promise to meet you at service. I am afraid Father O'Callaghan looks upon me as a heretic of the vilest description; but I will see you afterwards, and might even promise to give you refreshment as we do to the priest? Will you, Miss Corbett,

and the Countess de Ferrin honour us with your company at luncheon after service?’

‘I shall be delighted.’

And so, with bows and smiles, the party separated; the Corbetts turning off where the cross road diverged towards Deringham, while Maurice proceeded in the direction of Stourton Court.

‘What a nice young fellow that is,’ said Amelia, as they descended the hill. ‘I can’t make him out, though, quite. Do you think he admires that girl, or not?’

‘Who? Sir Maurice Perceval? I really do not know. I am such a bad hand at guessing these things.’

And as Helen spoke, a vision rose before her of the bright happy faces they had just seen.





## CHAPTER VI.

‘Le parfum de l’âme c’est le souvenir.’

**W**HEN they reached Maplewood, they found Mary Byers sitting wrapped in a grey Shetland shawl, her head on one side, contemplatively looking at the fire. The five o’clock tea-things were not yet cleared away, and Miss Amelia’s sharp eye immediately detected, by the *débris* of bread and butter, the used tea-cup, and tossed armchair standing on the other side of the fireplace, that her sister had been, as Anne would say, ‘receiving company.’

‘Who’s been here, Mary?’ she asked, while she walked to the table and took up the second cup, turning it to the light.

‘Mrs. Brotherton called. What a talker she is, when her husband isn’t present! My head quite aches with the questions she asked about Helen, and the gossip she re-tailed of everyone else.’

‘If there is one thing that could make me respect Mr. Brotherton more than I do, it is the wholesome state of awe in which he holds Mrs. B. ; but begin at the beginning, Mary, and tell us all the news.’

‘The Bishop is, as you know, to preach next Sunday. He has arrived to-day at Mr. Gibson’s, and is going to an “evening” at Mrs. Brotherton’s to-night. There’s dissipation, my dear! a real live bishop, to an accompaniment of lemonade and cakes; Mrs. Brotherton in her best satin gown, and Mr. Brotherton in clean bands.’

Mary Byers laughed until she was seized with a fit of coughing.

‘There is one thing quite certain,’ said Amelia, ‘that whatever dissipation and Bishops there may be in store for Helen and me, you do not stir out to-night in this easterly wind.’

‘I am much happier at home; but I must tell you also that Mrs. Brotherton said she hoped the Countess de Ferrin would not make herself remarkable by her dress! I asked her what she meant, and she explained that she hoped she would not look foreign. Upon which I answered, “But if she is foreign, what else would you have her look?” to which our friend made no answer. Now, Helen, I beg you to put on your very best and most startling gown, and roll up your hair and tuck it up and friz it out, and do everything you can to look “foreign.”’

‘This is most interesting,’ laughed Helen, taking a stool and sitting down at Mary Byers’s feet. ‘Tell me everything else she said about me.’

‘I have always heard it is as bad to retail gossip as to manufacture it.’ And Mary hesitated with tardy compunction.

‘My dear,’ said her sister, ‘you have always been celebrated for letting innumerable cats out of innumerable bags, and I don’t expect you are going to change at this



time of day; and, besides, your cats are such soft-purring ones, nobody minds them; so go on.'

'Well, of course she knew all about the dinner at Deringham, and had the impudence to tell me that Helen had sung a French song of doubtful morality, much to the scandal of everyone; and that when she finished, there was a dead silence in the room, people were so shocked. I endeavoured to suggest that I was certain you had done nothing of the kind; but she silenced me by saying that *all* French songs were immoral.'

'That is a good way of disposing of the difficulty,' said Helen, with a laugh. 'But go on.'

'Then she told me that you had made yourself so remarkable with Maurice Perceval at dinner; but, indeed, I can't remember all she said.'

'What an ill-natured woman she must be!' and a faint tinge of colour mounted to Helen's pale cheeks. 'There is an Eastern proverb that says: "Towers are

measured by their shadows, and great people by their calumniators." Let us hope it will be so in this case. For my part, I like gossips; they amuse me. I remember one old woman at Chanvrey—an awful *mauvaise langue*—who came to see me one day, and caught me hiding something away. She imagined it was a letter, or a present or something, from the young Count de Ruissac, who had danced a great deal with me at one or two of our little country dances, and who had been calling that morning. The old wretch thought it her duty to go and tell my husband of the incident—to put him on his guard, as she expressed it. She exaggerated the circumstances very much, declared that I blushed a great deal, and that she distinctly heard the crackle of a letter as I put it in my pocket when she came in. Poor dear man! he was quite upset, became jealous, watched everything I did—not in a spying way, he was too much of a gentleman for that; but I could see he was miserable. At last I asked him, point-blank, what was the matter. He

chivalrously told me the whole story. I made a confession. Do you know what I had hidden away in such a hurry?"

'No, my child; a silly letter, I dare say, of this young man's.'

'Nothing of the kind. Can you guess, Amelia?'

'No; but I have no doubt it was something you were quite right to be ashamed of.'

'If I take you into my confidence you will never tell Mrs. Brotherton, or Mrs. Corbett, or anyone?'

'We promise,' both the sisters said simultaneously, looking a little awe-struck.'

'Then I will whisper it into your ear, Mary. It was a doll's dress! I had been to Paris, and had spent a hundred francs my husband had given me for my "étrennes" on the most beautiful wax doll you ever saw, that opened and shut its eyes, and said "Mamma," and "Papa;" and that doll had been the delight of my life. I kept it shut up in a cupboard, and made a new set of clothes for it every fortnight. I was such

a baby myself when I was married,' the young woman added with a sigh, putting her head into Miss Mary's lap. 'After that my husband was so much more tender and loving and charming than he ever had been before, that I really was quite grateful to Madame Bodichon for what she had done.'

'My dear, I recommend you not to play with fire. Don't excite the tongue of scandal if you can possibly help it. It will react upon you sooner or later.'

Enunciating this dictum, Amelia walked towards the door.

'I must go now, and see about my dress for to-night. It is an important occasion in the lives of us Stourton folk.'

The two that were left sat silent for a time.

'Amelia is right,' said Mary presently. 'A life is often wrecked by scandal, and unfortunately it is sometimes the best-intentioned people who make the greatest mischief. Ah, my dear! you are young, and have all your future before you. I would warn you

of one thing—never thoughtlessly say anything to hurt your neighbour, and never without due consideration believe accusations against those you love.’ There was a tremble in her voice as she spoke. ‘I knew a girl once who broke off an engagement to the man she loved, in consequence of listening to gossip. People said he was not steady, and had flirted with a friend of hers. She saw him, and in her anger reproached him bitterly ; it was their last interview. She said such passionate things that it became a breach for the rest of their lives. He went away—they never were friends again ; and he married another woman ! From that day she became a sad, broken-hearted woman, but it was too late to regret the mischief her recklessness had wrought. Ever since I always warn others from heedlessly listening to idle gossip, for I afterwards heard there was no truth in the whole thing.’

The fire that lit up the faces of the two women had died down into a red glow.

Helen had hardly been prepared for this

confession—for Mary showed it to have been a confession of her own history, by the last words. The voice went on slowly and sadly:

‘I often ask myself now, “Would it have been happier for me never to have loved him?” The world might say “Yes,” but my own heart answers “No.” Blighted lives are sad, especially when they have been blighted by our own mistake; but after all, it is better to have the strength to love, even though that strength should afterwards be turned into the power to endure and suffer.’

There was a sob in the last words. Helen only raised the old lady’s hand to her lips, and then both were silent. Had Mary, with that prescience that distinguishes some unselfish hearts, wished to warn her young companion? or was it only the outcome of the more intimate development of their friendship? Who shall analyze these forebodings, that fall like shadows on the hearts of those that love us?

Presently the old lady said: ‘It is time I

think, my child, for you to go and prepare for this evening.'

'Is it so late?' asked Helen, looking up. 'I cannot see; the clock is half in the light and half in shadow.'

'Yes,' Mary answered softly, 'like some people's lives, half in brightness and half in darkness; but bright or dark, mercifully the hands go on counting off the minutes and hours, and days and years.'

Helen looked into the embers of the dying fire, and wondered if she would ever long for the flight of the hours, and days, and years.

About ten o'clock that evening, Miss Byers and Helen began the occult and mysterious preparations which were always gone through before one of these nocturnal expeditions.

The skirt of Miss Amelia's dress was first rolled up all round her waist and fastened with what she called a 'baby pin,' in front. A large circular cloak was then put on and hooked round her throat by Anne, officiating high priest on these occasions. A hood, marvellously and wonderfully made, covered

her head; while Anne put into the hand that was outstretched with difficulty, the box containing her cap, lace bow, and gloves. Her boots were a caution; and Helen, with her French prejudices, thought to herself that she would not even allow the lamp-posts to see her feet shod in such a fashion to walk from Maplewood Lodge to the Rectory. Stourton, like all country places, had a code of etiquette of its own, which was puzzling to the uninitiated, and Helen found it difficult to understand why, if it was considered *infra dig.* for Miss Byers to go visiting on foot, it was not in the least considered a violation of decorum to walk in the evening to any entertainment in the village.

At last they got off. Amelia tried to persuade her brother to come; he would not hear of it, but offered to accompany them as far as the door. This, however, she would not allow; if he came down, he must come in. So off they sallied alone.

When they reached the Rectory the people were arriving in numbers, and the



lady's cloak-room was full. While Amelia was divesting herself of her various habiliments, Helen was watching with much amusement the company, as they came in and out. Several pairs of girls had been brought by their mothers, for introduction to the Bishop before confirmation, and there was much whispering, shaking out of skirts, and smoothing of bows. With an arrangement of their features before the glass into a sweet and gracious company expression, and a side-glance at Helen as she sat waiting, each duck waddled off followed by her ducklings, determined to make them take to the water at once. Helen could not refrain from hoping that the young things had plenty of inward and spiritual grace, they had so little of it outwardly.

Mrs. Brotherton was standing in the doorway of the drawing-room, looking hot-cheeked and flurried. She was full of apparent amiability and courtesy, but it was easy to see how superficial her graciousness was. She was no longer young, but having a good digestion and but little wear and tear

on her nervous system, she had retained the prosperous bloom of youth. The face was handsome, but the figure so ungraceful, the hands so large and the feet so flat, that they rendered her general appearance displeasing. A bitterness might be detected also in her smile, and the compliments she had a knack of paying always contained a hidden sting. She would have been dangerous had she been clever.

‘How charming you look, dear Countess! You must allow me to introduce you to the Bishop presently. And your sister, Amelia? Ah, yes! poor thing, I saw her to-day; she was not fit to go out. Mr. Byers has not come, of course. Orthodoxy and the Church are not much in his way, I am afraid.’

‘He never goes anywhere of an evening,’ Miss Amelia answered snappishly; and passing on, she and Helen entered the room. The table had been pushed into the corner, and the ottoman drawn into the middle of the space left. On it were seated several ladies, all of whom craned their heads

round to watch the Bishop, who stood close by.

A subtle odour of sanctity and badly trimmed petroleum lamps mounted to Helen's nostrils, while she looked round at the assembled company. Beyond the ottoman stood a half-circle of chairs, on which the principal dignitaries of the place were installed. There was Mrs. Jackson the spirit merchant's wife, who felt the deepest contempt for Mrs. Thompson the distiller's wife as a person who dealt in '*raw grain*,' and therefore not fit to be associated with; and Mrs. White, wife of the manager of the branch of the Union Bank established at Stourton, who looked as if her dress were too tight, and as if she were oppressed by the necessity of continually asserting her dignity by snubbing the other two.

There is a story told of an English artist, who, being sent to India to paint a Durbar, found the greatest difficulty in observing artistic proportion and propitiating the feelings of the native princes, for, oblivious of the laws of perspective, one refused to cede in

importance to the other, and all insisted on being portrayed the same size. He would have found equal difficulty, I think, in dealing with the Stourton ladies; for certainly social precedence was far more important in their eyes than artistic excellence.

In the door opposite the entrance stood a group of young men laying down the law as young professional men do in country towns, while in the next room Helen caught glimpses of a card-table. Even the presence of the Bishop could not damp the ardour of Stourton for its rubber. Amidst all this activity and bustle she could not help smiling at one old lady seated next the wall, who had fallen asleep; her plush cap and feather nodding forward on her nose, and the large cameo of Aurora that decorated her bosom, heaving up and down gently as she breathed.

Round the ottoman a flutter of introductions and a whispering of onlookers was going on. Centre of the nucleus was the Bishop, a stout, portly man, with a twink-

ling eye, a humourous expression, and a complexion that spoke of good living. He smiled benevolently to each person in succession as Mr. Brotherton introduced them, holding the hands of the younger ladies an unnecessarily long time, Helen thought ; but she had already observed, even in her own Church, that when ecclesiastics had reached a certain rank they talked more confidentially and with greater emphasis to the other sex. It seemed to descend upon them with the lawn-sleeves and crozier.

As soon as Mr. Brotherton caught sight of Helen and Miss Byers he immediately bustled up.

‘Come and be introduced. I want you so much to make the Bishop’s acquaintance.’

‘My dear Mr. Brotherton,’ said Amelia, ‘do not trouble. I have been confirmed, and I do not want any preferment.’

‘You need not pretend that I am running after him for preferment either, Amelia. You know me too well for that; but he

has done me many a good turn, and he is fond—fonder, perhaps, than most of us—of a charming woman. I should like to gratify him, therefore, by a talk with your friend.’

‘ You will get into the wars if you do.’

‘ Never mind; I am case-hardened by this time.’

Mr. Brotherton thus playfully alluded to a possible misunderstanding between himself and the partner of his bosom, whom he thought a very clever and capable person, but whom he did not mind joking about when well out of earshot.

Immediately on the introduction, the Bishop entered into an animated conversation with Helen. In vain did anxious mothers wait for a sign or a look—none was vouchsafed to them or their daughters; and, evidently thinking he had done enough duty for the evening, he sat down on the ottoman with a sigh of relief, making a sign to Helen to take the seat beside him. The restraint seemed immediately taken off the general company, and the conversation,

which had been desultory among them until then, after breaking out into rivulets here and there, gradually combined into a full flowing river before many minutes were over. The young men in the doorway even began to talk more fluently. It was as though everyone had whispered into his neighbour's ear, 'The Bishop has proved himself to be but a man after all, with like instincts and infirmities as ourselves;' and they no longer looked on him as a species apart.

The old gentleman, unconscious of what was taking place, went deeply into Helen's history and concerns, asking her if she were French, and from what part of France; what she was called before she was married, and what her husband's profession had been; if she were a Catholic; how long she intended stopping at Stourton, etc. To all of which Helen replied as satisfactorily as she could, observing meantime that Mrs. Brotherton was becoming restless and uneasy. At last the poor lady could stand it no longer, and cross-

ing the room she asked the Bishop if he would allow her to introduce Mrs. Corbett and the Misses Corbett, of Deringham. He bowed courteously, and Helen, looking up, caught a sarcastic, laughing pair of eyes fixed on her. She smiled, and holding out her hand, saluted Sir Maurice Perceval.

‘How do you do again? I did not expect to meet you here.’

‘No; I am on duty. I was dining with the Corbetts, and as they were coming, I was over-persuaded. He,’ nodding at the Bishop, ‘is a relation, and old friend of my mother’s. I should have been obliged, therefore, sooner or later to pay my respects. But it’s rather ghastly, isn’t it?’

‘You are complimentary, to say the least. I beg to say that I am at present an inhabitant of the town of Stourton, and will stand up for it against the county. You landed proprietors are so stuck up.’

‘How severe you are! but there is Mrs. Brotherton coming to announce that lemonade and sponge-cakes—or what she



calls supper—is served. Can I take you down ?’

‘Certainly—but oh dear me, no, you can’t!’ poor Helen ejaculated, as the Bishop turned, offered her his arm, and said :

‘May I have the honour, Countess de Ferrin ?’ and ere she could remonstrate, he had led her off before everyone.

She was obliged to put her handkerchief before her face to choke back the laughter caused by the sight of the irritation visible on Mrs. Brotherton’s face, and Sir Maurice’s amused smile when they both entered the tea-room afterwards. She listened mechanically to the Bishop’s droning voice as he told her of travels he had made in France and Italy, and of the diocese he occupied in England. Already she was beginning to live in the interests and feelings of the little world into which she had been transplanted, and to enter into their joys and sorrows. She observed that the old lady with the plush cap and cameo brooch had been awakened, like the sleeping beauty in the fairy-tale, and had found a prince for

the time being in the shape of Mr. Corbett; that Dr. Clark had taken down Amelia Byers, and that Sir Maurice was sitting, not far off, beside Margaret Corbett. She hardly appreciated yet, however, that by thoughtless words and thoughtless deeds she was sowing a crop of ill-will and envy which might one day spring up and overshadow her life.

After supper some glees were performed, under the leadership of Mr. Ffrench, the curate, and Miss Gibson, a plain young lady with a fringe, and a contralto voice which she kept religiously locked within her breast.

As soon as the music was over, the Gibsons and the Bishop took their leave, and then the rest of the company dispersed.

When Miss Byers and Helen went to call on Mrs. Brotherton a few days after her entertainment, a letter from the Bishop was lying half-open on the table beside her, as if she were in the daily habit of perusing episcopal missives. She did not

tell Helen that there was a 'post scriptum' at the end, begging her to give his kindest regards to that pretty person, the Countess de Ferrin.





## CHAPTER VII.

‘So deeply inherent is it in this life of ours that men have to suffer for each other’s sins, so inevitably diffusive is human suffering, that even justice makes its victims, and we can conceive no retribution that does not spread beyond its mark in pulsations of unmerited pain.’

GEORGE ELIOT.

**M**ELEN came of a race who ever stood by Church and State, and had sacrificed lives and property in the cause of their religion and their king. Her great-grandmother on her father’s side, Comtesse de Carrel, had been one of the first to head the list of the famous ‘don patriotique,’ or ‘patriotic gift of jewels and plate’ made to Louis XVI. by the ladies of Paris. After enduring all the humiliations and insults to which she and her class were

subjected, the brave woman died on the scaffold, clasping the crucifix to her breast and murmuring a prayer to the Virgin and St. Helena, her patron saint. Her great-grandfather, the Comte de la Carrel, after having been besieged in his Château of Brittany by his own peasantry, joined the ranks of the Chouans, who for months kept the Republican army at bay. Being at last taken prisoner in a midnight skirmish, he was offered life and safety if he would divulge the hiding-place of his companions. 'A De Carrel has been taught how to die, but never how to betray,' was his only answer, and, baring his breast, he fell beneath the enemy's fire.

The only descendant of this hapless pair was a son, who went into the navy, a refuge in France at that time for all destitute Royalists. After a few years' service, he came back to visit the home of his childhood in Brittany, and found the factor of the estate, Eustace Brindon, in possession of his property. Hoping to obtain some restitution of his rights, he married

Brindon's rosy-cheeked daughter, and had by her one son, the father of my heroine.

Whether it was the Brindon blood, or that demoralizing waiting at court for favours which never came, young M. de Carrel turned out a very different man to his grandfather. Educated in Paris among the scions of *la petite noblesse*, he found himself launched on the world at twenty-two without money and without a profession. The quickest way, he thought, to achieve both was by paying court to his rich aunt, Madame de Grivel. Being old and blind, she had engaged at the Convent of the Augustines, in the Rue des Fossés, St. Antoine, a young girl as amanuensis and reader. Beatrice Ferrers had a soft voice, dark grey eyes, and a certain feminine grace. What more is necessary to catch the inflammable affections of two-and-twenty? Raoul de Carrel often dropped in of an afternoon, and sat listening in an armchair opposite his aunt, while Beatrice read Montalembert's picturesque lives of St. Augustin, St. Colomba, or St. Elizabeth.

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One day, however, the old lady put Jean Jacques' 'Nouvelle Héloïse' into her young companion's hands, overlooking, with the selfishness of her class and age, the inflammable nature of the contents. They were in the midst of St. Preux and Julie's letters, when they were interrupted by the entrance of Raoul de Carrel. Beatrice expected Madame de Grivel to tell her to stop, but to her embarrassment she did not do so; and the girl went stumbling on through the lovers' passionate phrases and eloquent declarations of undying affection.

When the reading was over, and Count Raoul rose to go, Madame de Grivel asked Beatrice, whom she looked on simply in the light of a reading and writing machine, to show him out.

Her cheeks still glowing, her eyes sparkling with the intoxicating effect of the words she had been reading, the young girl took the lamp to obey the old lady's injunctions. Hardly had she reached the last of the suite of rooms leading to the entrance, ere she felt an arm put round her,

and Raoul's lips murmuring close to her ear :

‘ Beatrice, I love you !’

For one second their lips met, and sealed a covenant that was destined to bind them together for the rest of their lives.

When Raoul came next day he found the girl again reading. She hardly dared lift her eyes, but the hand that held the book trembled so violently, and her utterance became so indistinct and hurried, that at last Madame de Grivel turned and looked at the blushing, shrinking figure, while she said severely:

‘ You read too quickly, my child; I can scarcely understand what you say. Begin that again ;’ and then sank back in her chair, apparently to listen passively.

When the reading was over, she requested Beatrice to leave the room, and, turning to her nephew, talked with him about his life and pursuits, his prospects and future, more kindly than she had done for some time. When bidding him good-bye, she said :



‘I think, my dear, you and I could talk more at our ease late in the evening. I will get you, therefore, henceforth to come to dinner. Send me a line beforehand, and come whenever you like.’

Opposition, rather than harmony, is the food of love. If there be excess of it, the appetite, ‘instead of sickening, and so dying,’ becomes keen and sharpened. Raoul thoroughly understood his aunt’s motives for requesting him to change his afternoon visits into evening ones, and the probability of his thus being deprived of the sound of Beatrice Ferrers’s sweet voice and the sight of her soft grey eyes fanned what might have been but a passing fancy into a serious passion. The reckless spirit of his race was aroused, and he determined, whatever the consequences, to indulge his passion. His grandfather, the chivalrous Comte de Carrel, would have risked his life for his lady-love, but would have preserved her honour intact. His grandson, with the leaven of ‘bourgeois blood’ in his veins, was more unscrupulous

and equally hot-headed. Denied the pleasure of seeing Beatrice in the ordinary way, he besieged her with letters, and after many supplications induced her to meet him secretly in some public gardens not far from his aunt's house. From that day the barriers were broken down, and he knew that Beatrice Ferrers belonged to him heart and soul. With the gentle tenacity of her race, however, she would listen to no overtures of love that the Church had not sanctioned ; and Raoul at last, driven headlong by the excess of his passion, proposed a secret marriage and flight. How could she, an inexperienced child, know that under the circumstances no marriage could be legal in her lover's country ?

All honourable scruples silenced, determined to make her his own, and give her the necessary reparation as soon as his age and the consent of his parents permitted, he presented the necessary document to the maire of his *arrondissement*, and stated untruly that, being twenty-five years of age, he had obtained permission to have the

ceremony performed without his father's presence. The young girl believed in the truth of what he told her, and leaving Madame de Grivel's one morning, went to a little church in the quarter where he lived. A hasty service was performed, and she returned to her afternoon duties with her employer, believing herself legitimately married to her lover.

After a few weeks Raoul and Beatrice felt that concealment was no longer possible, and dedicating themselves to 'the unpathed water's unseen shores' that every pair of lovers think they explore for the first time, they fled to a seaside place on the coast of Normandy.

Here all Raoul's tenderness was aroused for the woman he had deceived. The young man's passion developed into a true and heartfelt affection. He made a full confession to Beatrice of what he had done, and, after the birth of his baby girl, awaited with impatience his twenty-fifth birthday to legalize his marriage, and deliver the necessary declaration to his parents.

Alas for human intentions! Raoul, since his sojourn at the seaside, had learnt to swim, and with the enthusiasm of his nature (which knew no middle course), devoted himself to the art for hours at a time. The fisherman whose boat he took, and who went out with him, warned him once or twice of the dangers of over-fatigue, but only to undergo Raoul's arrogant ridicule. One day, while he was sitting in the sunshine dreaming, and Raoul was indulging in his favourite pastime, the old man heard a shriek, and looking up, saw a pair of arms outstretched for help. He immediately rowed to the place, and was only in time to drag an inert fainting form into the boat.

Being a kind-hearted man, and unwilling to frighten the young wife unnecessarily, he rowed to shore, and sent for a doctor on his own responsibility. The learned man pronounced the case to be hopeless; a valve of the heart was broken. Poor Beatrice, scared and speechless, held her lover's cold and senseless form 'a few hours later in her arms.

With the chastity of affection and proud reserve of her nature, young Madame de Carrel—for so she henceforth insisted on calling herself—finding herself left neither wife nor maid by no fault of her own, withdrew with her infant daughter to the privacy of a life devoted to the Church, and to her maternal affection. She was a woman of no culture, no broad aims ; it is therefore easy to imagine that as time went by her love became touched with jealousy, her religion with bigotry, and her politics with selfishness. Her husband's parents completely ignored her and her illegitimate daughter's existence. They took away their son's body, buried it amidst his ancestors in Brittany, and then relapsed into the dry-eyed grief of old age, resigning themselves to leaving the property to a representative of the younger branch of the Brindons, so long as he consented to take the De Carrel name, and mould himself politically and religiously on their pattern. The only person who did anything for the widow was Madame de Grivel, whose conscience pricked her for having

unconsciously aided in the catastrophe that had taken place. She wrote a letter informing the widow that she would make her an allowance of two thousand francs a year (eighty pounds), and with the power of her money obtained permission from the family that she should bear Raoul's name, which certainly was hers in the sight of heaven, if not of men.

Ardent, impulsive, and devoted, Madame de Carrel was one of those natures with whom the Church is all-powerful.

She called her little daughter Helen, or Helena, after her great-grandmother, and the saint of that name; hung a piece of the true cross, encased in gold, round her neck, and brought her up strictly in all the observances of the Church. Cramped in the restricted, shabby life their poverty entailed upon them, the girl, with her imaginative nature, turned to the consolation of religion as a flower turns to the sun. Despised and ignored by her noble relatives in Paris, in consequence of the stain of illegitimacy on her birth, she was

cut off from most of the outlets and amusements natural to her age ; in religion, however, she found a substitute and consolation. When, later, the romance with her cousin Henri was over, and the monotonous quiet of her union with the Count de Ferrin had begun, the old cathedral of Vilarette, with its spires cleaving the sky, its shadowy aisles, and lamp-lit chapels, represented the poetry and aspiration of her life; while the human beauty of the Holy Mother and Child satisfied the animate, sentient portion of her nature. It constituted the great bond between her and her mother; and many were the moments of selfishness and wilfulness Helen had forgiven when she saw the depth of her devotion and the abandonment of her penitence before the altar afterwards. She had written from Maplewood, as we have seen, with some misgivings, to say that there were no facilities for carrying out the observances of her religion, and with a proportionate amount of relief had afterwards been able to let Madame de Carrel know

that she had arranged to attend mass at Stourton Court chapel with Margaret Corbett. Happy as she was in the sunshine and the brightness around her, she had missed one thing, and could not bear to contemplate the idea of worshipping in the Protestant church. The chapel at the Court, on the other hand, with its incense and its flowers, satisfied all her desires.

There was a mist, that seemed to portend a thaw, hanging over everything when she and Margaret started on the Sunday morning. The coachman, knowing they were going to the chapel, drove on beyond the principal entrance to the Court, and turned up a side-road, under two great cedars, that threw a deep shadow across the pathway, trodden and brown with the footprints of the worshippers who had passed that morning. Descending before a flight of steps, they sent the carriage away, and entered a low-porched doorway that led to the chapel. Helen sat through the service, listening to Mr. O'Callaghan's deep, impressive voice, in a trance-like dream. All



the surroundings seemed so different to anything she had seen in the ceremonial of her religion before; and yet the same feeling of exaltation and devotion was evoked. The clouds of incense carried her soul to higher aims than those immediately surrounding her, the priestly voice called forth a distinct sentiment of sympathy and communion with the other existences praying beside her, and an immediate yearning for emotions and affections outside her own personality, that almost amounted to pain.

Are we to submit our highest impulses to the test of scientific investigation, and to agree with physiologists that this is a dangerous frame of mind for any human mind and heart to be in ?

When Helen and Margaret came out from the chapel, they turned to the right, intending to get away at the side-door by which they had arrived, when they heard a voice behind them say:

‘It is raining, Countess de Ferrin; won’t you and Miss Corbett stay and lunch with us?’

Turning, they saw Maurice Perceval standing in the gloom of the passage behind them.

‘My mother sent me to offer you wraps and umbrellas if you insisted on starting in such weather; but I, for my part, hope to persuade you not to do so.’

Helen appealed to her companion, and saw assent written in Margaret Corbett’s eyes. She then looked at Sir Maurice, and asked :

‘Is it raining?’

‘Yes; you will get wet through if you attempt to go home just now.’

Helen walked towards the door, and looked out at the dismal scene. The walls of the kitchen-garden that stretched beneath them were dripping; great pieces of loosened snow were sliding off the roof of the gardener’s tool-house. A thick mist covered the landscape, and as the church-goers went out one by one, with skirts and trousers tucked up, the drops of rain pattered on their umbrellas.

‘I think you will agree with me that it

is hardly weather in which you could comfortably face a two-mile walk !'

Helen looked up, puzzled.

'No, I don't think it is; but what do the Byers' think? I said I would meet you at luncheon at half-past one.'

'They will manage to resign themselves to your absence, perhaps, for one day,' Maurice, smiling.

'They will know you have stopped,' he added Margaret Corbett.

'Very well, we had better decide now; but are you quite sure your absence will not be inconvenienced?'

'She will be delighted, I assure you.'

And turning, he led the way up the passage into the south drawing-room.

The weather had been too threatening for the old lady to venture so far as St. Mary's, but they could see she had gone to the services of her Church by the book that lay open on the table before her. She rose to receive her guests, and expressed the greatest gratification at the success of her mission.

‘ You had evidently forgotten that you promised to stop to luncheon if you came to service here to-day !’

‘ I made no arrangements for doing so ; however, I hope the Byers’ will understand. We must be back, under any circumstances, for afternoon service at three.’

‘ Yes, yes—Maurice shall take you back after lunch ; but I can tell you, for your satisfaction, that your friend the Bishop will not preach, Countess de Ferrin. I heard of you the other evening. You have caused quite a commotion. Mrs. Brotherton can’t get over it. I imagine the old gentleman expected you to attend service at the Stourton church.’

‘ Yes ; I am so sorry,’ said Helen, smiling. ‘ I have deprived Mrs. Brotherton, too, of a chance of snatching a brand from the burning.’

At that moment Mr. O’Callaghan entered, and was immediately introduced to Helen and Margaret by Lady Perceval.

After lunch it rained more persistently than ever ; but the young people, summon-

ing up courage, determined to make their way home. Lady Perceval regretted being unable to offer them a carriage of any kind, but supplied them with shawls and umbrellas. With much amusement and laughter, they prepared for the expedition—Margaret arrayed herself in one of Sir Maurice's ulsters, while Helen put on a waterproof cape and white comforter she found hanging in the hall. The owner of the habiliments insisted on accompanying them, as he said he intended also going to Stourton for afternoon service. The three sallied forth, Maurice walking beside Margaret Corbett, whom he protected with his umbrella, Helen plashing behind through the wet snow on the only available portion of the pathway.

When they came where the road branched off to Deringham, they stopped to consult whether Margaret Corbett should go home at once, or accompany Helen to Maplewood Lodge. After some consultation, it was arranged she should do the latter; and that Maurice should go to Deringham to tell

the Corbetts her decision, and then follow them to Maplewood afterwards.

As the two young women pursued their way together, Helen could see by Margaret's manner that she was stirred out of her ordinary calm. She piqued herself on a knowledge of her own sex, and thought she read Margaret's secret in the look of her eyes, the tremble of her lips, and the flush on her cheek.

'Poor little thing!' was the mental observation of the woman of the world. 'I wonder if he cares for her? She has money, and he has looks. What a suitable match it would be!'

By the time they reached Maplewood, Helen was so tired that Amelia insisted on her taking off her wet things, and sitting down before the fire to rest and get warm, instead of thinking of going to church. Margaret Corbett, of tougher fibre, did not seem to feel the cold and fatigue so much, but did not deeply regret giving up all idea of going out again.

When Maurice arrived from Deringham,

he found Mary Byers, Helen, Margaret Corbett, and Mr. Byers sitting over the fire in the smoking-room, Amelia having gone to church. Helen had changed her dress, and put on a clinging, lace-trimmed tea-gown. Thanks to the waterproof ulster, Margaret had escaped intact.

‘So you are not going to church after all,’ he said, as he entered the room, flushed and weather-beaten from his walk. ‘This is what ladies call gratitude. I am sent tramping over hill and dale apparently to obtain permission for a young lady of my acquaintance to say her prayers this afternoon. What reward do I receive? I find said young lady sitting over the fire in anything but a devotional frame of mind.’

‘The best thing you can do is to come and join us,’ said Mr. Byers, stretching out his legs, supremely happy and indolent.

Maurice sat down, and, as usual on Sunday afternoon, they began a religious argument, which, considering the extremely liberal opinions held by Mr. Byers and

Maurice, and the extremely strict ones held by the Countess de Ferrin, was a dangerous occupation.

At last, in the course of conversation, Sir Maurice used the word 'cant,' and added :

'Religious people seem to me to do so much harm to religion, that I think it as well to hold aloof from the whole thing.'

'What do you mean?' said Helen, flushing to the roots of her hair. 'I cannot bear to hear all that is dearest to me in the world made light of.'

'Don't be afraid, Countess de Ferrin,' put in Mr. Byers gently. 'Sir Maurice only wants an argument, and finds me generally too indifferent or too cold to hold one.'

'I am not arguing, only stating my opinion;' and Maurice tossed back his front lock, a sure sign of his being in a combative mood. 'It seems to me that the tendency of the day is towards the cultivation of charitable judgments and moderate views—real religion, in fact, and true knowledge.'



‘It depends on what you call true knowledge ;’ and the young woman played impatiently with the tassel of her tea-gown. ‘See what my religion—for, as you know, I am what you call a Papist—has done for you. Putting all spiritual advantages out of the question, has it or has it not given English people everything beautiful they possess in literature and art?’

‘Hardly.’

‘Has it not,’ she went on, with flushed cheeks, ‘the seal of confession and martyrdom on it? And how dare we, who never sacrificed ourselves for anything, criticize its tenets?’

‘I do not mean to say that perhaps in the middle ages it had not a beneficial effect; but it seems to me that the religion of the present day is like Mr. Gordon’s art—decayed, over-ripe, without expansion and without strength, requiring every artificial aid to prop it up—flowers, incense, music.’

‘Come, come,’ remonstrated Mr. Byers; ‘here you are offending Miss Corbett by speaking slightly of Mr. Gordon, and

Countess de Ferrin by speaking slightly of her religion.'

But Maurice, once he met with opposition, especially from a woman, was not so easily stopped.

'As you mention confession, I may say that I think it would be the greatest curse to my country if such a thing were brought back again. I know what I should do if I heard of my sister or anyone I cared for going to confess.'

'Simply because you know nothing about it. You could not understand how a confessor can be the friend, the confidant, the light of an erring soul.'

'Thank God, I don't.'

'Confession is but the development of repentance into love.'

Warned by the glistening of Helen's eye, the tremble in her voice, and not quite grasping the mystic signification of her last statement, Maurice turned to Mr. Byers.

'That is always the result of a wet Sunday. I argue and say something I ought not to. I have now succeeded in

offending both Miss Corbett and Countess de Ferrin.'

'You have not offended me,' said Helen sharply.

'Come, if you were indifferent you would not be so severe. Allow that I did, and let me have the satisfaction of amply begging your pardon.'

'I don't think you did,' and a smile broke out round Helen's lips, while she took up the paper partly to protect her face from the heat of the fire, partly to pretend to read it, and isolate herself from the conversation.

'By-the-bye, did you see the report of Smith's speech to the working men at Bradford? tolerably inflammatory, isn't it?' asked Mr. Byers, anxious to change the subject; and both gentlemen were soon plunged into a political discussion, in which Helen heard the words 'socialistic tendencies,' 'aristocrat,' 'obstruction,' 'produce,' 'labour,' etc., bandied backward and forward. She at last, however, became absorbed in her paper, and forgot them.

‘What are you studying so intently, Countess de Ferrin?’ asked Mr. Byers presently.

She laid down her paper with a smile.

‘I was only reading an account of the appearance of this new actress as Rosalind.’

‘Who? I have not seen anything about it!’

‘It is Mrs. Scott, wife of that nice-looking fellow—you know him—he is in the Foreign Office,’ said Maurice; ‘and I cannot for the life of me think what induces him to let his wife go on the stage.’

‘His poverty, and not his will consents, I should think, poor devil!’ and Mr. Byers pushed down the tobacco in his pipe.

‘If I were he then, I would sooner see my wife in the grave than appearing in public.’

‘Why, pray?’ asked Helen, folding her hands on the paper on her knee, and turning with an air of indignant inquiry to Sir Maurice.

‘Please don’t look at me like that. I have offended you once, and should be sorry to do so again, Countess de Ferrin. But

surely you agree with me that publicity is an unmitigated evil for any woman?’

‘I don’t agree with you at all; in fact I hold completely opposite opinions. I think the greatest mission anyone can fulfil, is to interpret adequately the thoughts transmitted to us by noble thinkers.’

‘There are lots of women to do it efficiently, without taking them from our class.’

‘Our class? What is your class? If the socialist ideas you were discussing just now become a *fait accompli*, as they are certain to, who will stand in the Perceval shoes, I should like to know, a hundred years hence?’

Sir Maurice made a mock gesture of despair. ‘It is no good; I am evidently destined to incur not only your displeasure myself, but to draw down your wrath on my posterity. I think I shall bolt;’ throwing his cigar testily into the fire, he rose.

‘No, no; please, Sir Maurice, don’t let me drive you away,’ said Helen, in a fit of penitence.

‘If you appeal to me in that manner, I shall feel more inclined than ever to lay the blame on your shoulders; but I must be off, it is nearly six o’clock. If you will give me that ulster and comforter,’ he said, turning to Margaret Corbett, ‘I can take them back with me.’

As he was putting the latter over his arm, he looked with a smile at Helen.

‘Had you lived at the time of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, Countess de Ferrin, instead of tying this round your Huguenot co-religionist’s arm, you would, I feel sure, have urged him to die for his religion and his country.’

‘*Cela dépend,*’ was the laughing reply.

‘What an extraordinary thing is class-prejudice,’ said Helen meditatively, as she sat opposite the fire in Mr. Byers’s study that evening.

‘Not more extraordinary than any other human weakness,’ replied her host, smiling. ‘But what has led you to this reflection, Countess de Ferrin?’

‘Sir Maurice Perceval’s observations to-

day about Mrs. Scott. Why shouldn't the poor woman go on the stage? If her husband and children want bread and butter, what more natural than that she should try and earn it for them, if she can?

'There are other ways of earning it than by going on the stage.'

'Perhaps acting is the only thing she can do.'

'I should doubt it; if a woman has the intelligence to act, you may be sure she has the intelligence to do other things. Believe me, there is always a basis of truth in the sentiments expressed by society. It is an undesirable thing for a woman to take to a profession which necessitates appearing in public.'

'I am sorry to hear it, because it is exactly what I meditate doing.'

'You?'

'Yes, I! I have thought of speaking to you about it several times since I have been here, and asking your advice. I do not propose anything quite so dreadful, according to Sir Maurice Perceval's ideas,

as "going on the stage;" but ever since I was a child, I have had a taste for reciting. I inherit it, I suppose, from my father's nation, and now I intend to make it my profession.'

'You do not know the perseverance and physical strength it requires.

'I know all. I have counted up every contingency. My "physique" is not strong enough to undergo the drudgery of acting, but I could undertake drawing-room recitations. I have seen these things advertised; there are people who make a livelihood out of it in London. And you see, my dear friend, I must do something. My fan-painting and needlework was all very well in Paris—life is not so expensive there; but in England I find it quite inadequate to supply our wants, and we do not like, for reasons which it is impossible to explain, to go back to Paris just now.'

'What do your uncle and mother say to the idea?'

'I can persuade my uncle, but I am afraid I shall have great difficulty with my mother.'



‘Is there no other solution possible?’ he asked, with a meaning smile.

‘None.’

‘You must give me time, then, to think it over. I will see what I can advise you. There is a great deal of contrariness in your disposition, Countess Helen. I believe our conversation to-day has given a stimulus to your dormant intentions.’

‘Perhaps.’

‘What would Amelia say if she knew what we were plotting? and—talk of the devil—there she is, I believe, outside.’





## CHAPTER VIII.

'Youth like summer morn,  
Age like winter weather ;  
Youth like summer brave,  
Age like winter bare.'

SHAKESPEARE.

'REMEMBER, you are to come to us in June,' said Miss Byers, standing at the door of Maplewood Lodge, as Helen stepped into the carriage that was to take her to the station.

'We will forgive you if you appear in May,' added John Byers, walking beside the carriage, holding Helen's tiny gloved hand in his, while the family landau, with William on the box, and a portmanteau on the top, crunched over the gravel-drive.

The wind had veered again to the north, bringing a morning frost with its icy breath.

The upturned earth was spread on either side of the road, like a soft brown texture interwoven with silver; while the diamond-decked hedge glistened in the sun. In the valley stretched a wide expanse of wood and field, that lay under the sunlight like a sheet of gold, inlaid with purple depths of shadow; luminous veil of mist hung between her and it.

On entering the railway carriage, she put her modest roll of wraps and bag on the opposite seat, threw herself into a corner of the carriage, and, indifferent to the fate of nations or the world, folded her hands on the unread newspaper and indulged in one of those fits of melancholy abstraction which are so apt to creep over all of us in the transitions and pauses of life. This radiant world, shining and brilliant, seemed slipping away from her like an intangible dream; she felt as if she were stepping out of fairyland into a sordid region of worry and care. This feeling changed directly to a sense of irritation with herself—she was returning to her mother, whom she loved better than anything in the world—she was

returning to duty and work. What was the cause of this indefinite intangible depression? Could it be that altered circumstances had so deteriorated her nature that she hankered after the material luxuries of Maplewood Lodge, and shrank from the shabby contracted lodgings, and the attendance of the girl-of-all-work?

Helen was no philosopher, and could not analyze her own feelings. She did not comprehend the doctrine of compensation, which rules everything in the world. So much sadness to so much gladness—so much pain to so much pleasure, the everlasting debit and credit system to which Nature subjects all her children.

The period of her stay with her friends at Stourton had been happy and unclouded. She had mixed with congenial people, and had been appreciated and made much of; and the days had flown unnoted in their passage. Now she must put on the harness of humdrum life again. As much solicitude and more love would surround her at home, but she would have the burden

of work and care to carry, and the curb will fret and the collar rub.

Russell Place, Fitzroy Square, had once been a fashionable locality, as the stone-faced houses, with their gloomy porticoes, still indicated. No. 12 stood at the corner of the street next the end, and a glimpse could be obtained from the upper windows of a clump of smoke-grimed trees and a dusty piece of turf, the property of the inhabitants of the square. The houses which had once been tenanted by stately ladies were now taken possession of by dress-makers and laundresses; and the street down which sedan-chairs and chariots had formerly swept were now deserted, even by the vestry of the parish, who allowed dust-heaps to accumulate, and orange-peel to lie scattered on the pavement. Sometimes a ray of sunlight would fall from the square across the street, or the caged canary opposite would try to sing; but these glimpses of cheerfulness almost made the inhabitants feel as melancholy as the misdirected efforts of some of the new-comers to furbish up the

old houses by painting them artistic reds and greens—it only threw the black frontage of the others into more disadvantageous relief.

The perfidious memory of a tranquil, stately old house, permeated with the scent of bygone roses, would, in spite of herself, creep over Helen's senses, as she stood on the door-step inhaling the smell of hot clothes from the laundry opposite, and listening to the fighting of the boys and the rattling of the cabs as they passed down the street. All despondency and want of harmony was forgotten, however, when she felt her mother's arms round her.

‘My child, my child! I am so glad to get you back! Ah, everything is rose-colour again now! Come in. I have got some lunch ready. You must be hungry and tired.’

‘No, dear little mother, I am neither; and I want to hear about you. You are not well. You have been out of spirits?’

‘Yes, dearest; but now that I have you

back, it will be all right. I shall be quite well again.'

The room which they entered as they spoke was upstairs on the first-floor. Though shabbily, even poorly furnished, it was more harmonious in general effect than Miss Byers's green and gold apartment at Maplewood Lodge. The sombre gloom of the street was shut out by a pair of muslin and guipure curtains, evidently the produce of Parisian manufacture. On a small table in one of the windows, where, when Madame de Carrel and Helen first occupied the room, a glass shade on a terracotta stand had covered some wretched, half-withered ferns, now stood a plaster cast of the Dante statue of the Santa Croce Square in Florence; the smoke-browned chimneypiece they had adorned with a piece of Eastern stuff, while on the shelf above they had placed some inexpensive Japanese screens and vases. The shabby arm-chairs had also been covered with oriental embroideries, while the landlady's cheap prints on the walls had been replaced by

engravings of some of Corot and Millet's landscapes. In front of the farthest window stood the cottage piano, and beside it was a music-case full of folios and books, which looked as if they were in constant use.

A white cloth covered the table in the middle of the room; and Helen, talking and laughing, sat down to the luncheon her mother had prepared.

Madame de Carrel was a woman of about forty-six or forty-seven, bearing still the remains of great beauty. Her eyes were dark and sparkling, though the lids above them had the crumpled look that the weeping of many tears gives, while the lines on the brow told of fretfulness and discontent. She had been tempted to veil the ravages time had effected on her delicate complexion by artificial means, and that, combined with her white hair and the vinaigrette and lace handkerchief she always held in her hand, gave her the appearance of a Vandyke portrait.

‘How unhappy you will be here, after all



that luxury and those good breakfasts and dinners! See, that is all I could get for you.'

Madame de Carrel pointed ruefully to the cold fowl and ham, the only viands on the table.

'Dear mother, I am sure they are delicious. Now please sit down, and don't tire yourself standing about. I want to know all you have been doing, and who has been here, and if you have seen much of Uncle Laurence, and how he is—everything in fact ; so begin at the beginning.'

'I need not tell you it was too cold for me to go out,' said the old lady, smiling. 'I have sat at home, and some friends have come to see me. Laurence dropped in, as usual, every evening ; then Mr. Burt came to know if you could paint him a fan, an order he had from a lady. I did not write to you about it. I was afraid of spoiling your holiday. But I longed for the thirty shillings it would have brought into our exchequer ; our funds are very low.'

'Never mind, dear mother. I will set to

work and make a heap of money, you will see.'

The young woman laid her head caressingly on her mother's shoulder.

'Our landlady wants to be paid, Helen. What are we to do? But here I am already saddening your home-coming, which for me is worse than spoiling your holiday. We will talk of all these worries later. Meantime, tell me about everyone at Stourton. How are the Byers'? And these Corbetts and Percevals—who are they?'

'The Corbetts are very rich people, who might be useful in many ways,' said Helen, nervously turning to her food again. 'The Percevals are very nice—Lady Perceval quite charming. I am sure you would delight in her.'

'Ah! I understand. The Corbetts are useful and rich; the Percevals are useless and nice.'

'I did not quite say that, mother. But now give me my letters to read, and then I must go and unpack.'

‘I am afraid there is nothing but bills. Poverty is certainly a disagreeable evil.’

Forgetting the resolution just made, the old lady put a packet of letters into Helen’s hand, and then, sinking into an armchair by the fire, watched her as she opened them.

When Helen had done, she put all the letters together with a sigh, and turning, said :

‘I must go and unpack now. Come with me, mother, and we can talk while I lay my things away.’

Madame de Carrel was a thorough gossip. The lines in her brow disappeared, a smile hovered round her lips, as, seated on the bed in Helen’s bedroom, she chatted away.

‘And so you and Amelia Byers dined with these Corbetts, and you sang, and Mr. Corbett took you in to dinner. They seem to have made a great deal of you, Helen. You never will consent to come and live quietly in this dingy little hole again. And

you wore your white muslin gown. How ridiculous it is that you, in your position, should be obliged to dress in such a way! No ornaments, either. I must look out some of the things old Madame de Grivel left me. They are not of much value, but they would make a change—not always that eternal amber necklace. There is that lace, too, that your poor father gave me after we were married.'

'Dear little mother!' and Helen leant over her mother's chair and kissed her; 'don't trouble about me. If I had a thousand dresses, I think I should always wear plain white and black in preference to anything else.'

'My child, make no mistake about it. I believe in the appearance of the woman the total of whose dress bill is more than two figures.'

'Our finances would look rather funny if mine did, so don't let us think any more on the subject; and now I must turn all my energies to getting some work. I will go to Mr. Burt's to-morrow,

and see if I can secure the fan you speak of.'

'I wish I could help you, but I always was a useless creature;' and Madame de Carrel folded her hands with one of her sudden attacks of woebegone helplessness.

That evening Mr. Ferrers dropped in, as was his invariable custom, for a rubber with Madame de Carrel. He was her half-brother, their father having married twice. They were descended from one of the oldest and poorest Roman Catholic families in the north of England. When very young he had been sent to serve his novitiate as a priest in Rome, and was separated from his sister for many years of his life.

They met again in Paris when she was a widow, living ignored by her husband's relatives, and almost in a state of penury. He helped her as well as he could, and from that day was a constant and welcome inmate. It was at his advice, as well as the Byers', that she and Helen came to London; and it was he

who recommended them No. 12, Russell Place, where he lived on the ground-floor, while they occupied the apartments above.

Though only about ten years Madame de Carrel's senior, he looked quite twenty years older; the wrinkles on his face had been written by thought, not by age or sadness. He was bald, his back was bent, his face pale, and he was near-sighted. His expression generally was the expression of a dreamer; but when his features were illumined by the flame of enthusiasm, or he were discussing any political or social question, he suddenly, like Faust, seemed to cast off the envelope of old age that surrounded him, and to regain his vanished youth.

Helen often imagined she could perceive a likeness between her uncle and Mr. Byers, but the latter was more worldly, more practical; he had had a lawyer's bringing up, whereas Laurence retained the impress left by his visionary semi-religious, semi-material training for the priesthood, and the sadness invariably the result of having

quitted the fabric of beliefs and illusions that had beautified youth. Brought up to the priesthood of the Catholic Church, he had, after a period of probation, found the practice so opposed to the precepts, and ecclesiastical doctrine so dissimilar to the doctrine of Christ and the possibilities of human life, that he cast it from him, and donned the garb of a reformer in place of it. Luckily he was passive rather than active, a dreamer rather than a doer; otherwise he would have been heard ranting of freedom in Ireland one day, in France the next, in Russia the next, and might have helped to swell the ranks of political prisoners in Kilmainham, New Caledonia, or Siberia. He contented himself as it was, however, with writing for papers of Liberal tendencies, and with eking out the pittance which an elder brother saw fit to send him from an impoverished north-country estate, by the exercise of his pen in the service of what he called liberty and enlightenment. As a writer he was brilliant and suggestive, but ever an unsafe reasoner. His theories

were embryonic, and his panaceas for the regeneration of society unfeasible.

Though fully employed as a writer of magazine articles or leaders, he never took any considerable position as a thinker. Indeed, if he had been asked to make his choice, he would for ever have laid aside the pen and devoted himself to music, for which he had a rare gift. Theoretically, alas! genius may be a Divine alchemy which turns everything to gold; materially, the effect proved to be rather the reverse. While still in the priesthood he had written an opera entitled 'Judith,' which was pronounced by the authorities to be profane; and the youth had the satisfaction of knowing that what had cost him many hours of ecstasy and delight had been secretly burnt, so as effectually to remove all temptation from his path.

After his secession from the priesthood he had composed some slight things; but not having been able to effect a sale for them, had given up music in despair and taken to literature. His singing and playing was an



unalloyed source of pleasure to Helen, and that, and her affection for him personally, made a strong bond between them. Uncle Laurence, as she called him in her serious moods—Don Lorenzo, or Lorenzo il Magnifico, in her joyous moments—was ever her admirer in difficulty, and her support in trouble. He helped her to amuse his capricious irritable sister, and was ever ready to drink a cup of coffee, gossip, to play cards, or sing, as Helen chose to dictate.

This evening, when he came in, he found mother and daughter sitting in the long winter twilight, talking.

‘Why are you seated like two conspirators in the dark? I am sure you are hatching mischief,’ he said, with a laugh, as he opened the door.

‘Why, *petite mère*, we had forgotten all about lights, hadn’t we?’ said Helen.

‘Yes; and now I don’t know where that girl has put the matches,’ grumbled Madame de Carrel, getting up and groping about on the chimneypiece.

‘Sit down here again directly. I am

home now, and you are to be perfectly lazy, and do nothing at all.'

Pushing her mother gently back into her armchair, Helen moved her deft fingers amongst the vases and round the clock until she found the match-box. After the light was struck, the usual ceremony was gone through of drawing out the rickety old card-table, with its spotted and moth-eaten green baize cover, and of putting two packs of well-used cards and a box of counters upon it. She then went to wheel her mother up, and sat down opposite, with Laurence on the other side, to play *écarté*, *vingt-et-un*, or whist. This was the routine every evening, and Madame de Carrel would as soon have thought of going to bed without her cards, as of coming down in the morning without her rouge and her vinaigrette.

The card-playing was always a great ordeal to Helen ; but to-night, with the tension and excitement of her home-coming still tingling in her veins, and the change from the outdoor active life she had been

leading to the closely curtained, constrained atmosphere of the small London room, it was particularly irksome.

Laurence Ferrers looked up once or twice almost astonished, as she fidgeted and seemed a little impatient. He generally sat with stoical imperturbability, while Madame de Carrel, oblivious of everything but her game, counted up her points and put up her counters with a diligence worthy of a Newton or a Franklin working out a problem destined to revolutionize the world. It was very well, Helen thought, to make vows of abnegation and high-minded virtue, but sometimes it was very hard to trim the wick of the lamp of self-sacrifice, and make it burn clear and radiant; the light would sometimes smoke and throw off the noxious vapours of impatience and discontent.

‘You seem out of sorts to-night,’ Laurence at last said under his breath, in his brusque quick way, which hid so much tender solicitude and care for the discomfort or desires of those he cared about.

‘It is nothing, only the air is so oppres-

sive ;' and Helen looked up breathlessly at the closed windows.

' Do you think we might open the door?' he whispered.

Before Helen could answer, her mother's voice, monotonous and unconscious, said beside her, ' Would you cut, please ?' and the game proceeded.

The last rubber was played in process of time ; the points were counted, and Madame de Carrel rose. Laurence, knowing he possessed the talisman that could always calm Helen's excited nerves, went to the little cottage piano in the corner of the room, and began running his hands gently up and down the keys, bringing a sighing murmur out of the instrument, which gradually grew into a passionate appeal, traversed now and then by a sharp note that sounded like a despairing cry, and as suddenly changed into the agitation of tumultuous joy, bearing the soul of the listener up into the realms of space, and giving expression to the pulsations of her heart, and the aspirations of her soul. Helen felt as if it were her own personality

that was struggling and conquering fate, and she sank back in an exultation of delight. Then gradually the harmonious phrases became articulate, and his voice joined the accompaniment, breaking into a passionate sigh rather than song. The words were scarcely audible as he breathed them forth.

‘Perchè torni in fior la rosa,  
Amor mio, l’april ci vuol,  
Per, far l’anima pensosa  
Dell’età che sorge il sol.

‘Questa nota vagabonda  
Che par gioja ed è dolor,  
Calma, mistica, profonda,  
Questa fiamma ha nome Amor!’

Helen sat listening in a trance-like frame of mind, and when he had finished did not even thank him. Her mother’s voice was the first thing to recall her to the realities of life.

‘What is the name of that song, Laurence? It is like a dirge, and makes me feel quite melancholy.’

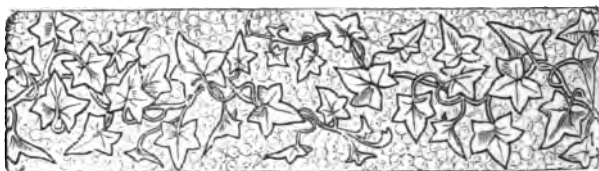
‘I don’t know what it is called, but it is always on the same old subject,’ he said

softly, dropping his hands off the keys.  
'Once I begin, I shall go on all night ; so I  
must tear myself away now.'

He shut down the piano, took his leave,  
and went humming the last words—

'Calma, mistica, profonda !  
Questa fiamma ha nome Amor !'





## CHAPTER IX.

‘Nor mine the sweetness and the skill,  
But mine the love that will not tire,  
And, born of love, the vague desire  
That spurs an imitative will.’

*In Memoriam.*

**N**EXT day Helen equipped herself early for an expedition to Princes Street, Hanover Square, where Mr. Burt, fan-maker in ordinary to her Majesty the Queen, the Princess of Wales, Empress of Austria, etc., resided. Mr. Burt was very civil, as became so illustrious a tradesman, but regretted extremely having already given away the order he wished her to execute. He had had another offered him that morning—white lilacs on a black ground—but was tied to price, and would not be able to give

her more than thirty shillings for her work. Helen accepted what she could get, and thought, with considerable sinking of the heart, how little it would help towards the expenses at home.

She asked him if he had nothing else.

‘No ; times were bad,’ he said. ‘People did not seem to be ordering anything.’

She left the shop with a heavy heart, and on her way home turned into one of the large shops in Regent Street to buy the silk for the commission she had accepted. She did her work conscientiously, and would have nothing but the best materials. Unfortunately, the purchases took more than a quarter of the prospective profits. She hastened out and home, however, determined to set to work at once.

‘To mortal men great loads allotted be,  
But of all packs no pack like poverty ;’

yet there are some natures whom it does not embitter.

The stoic, who shuts himself up from the ‘earthenware huckaback beings of the nether world,’ is not the greatest hero. It is the



nervous, sensitive nature, who, loving ease and luxury, sets his or her shoulder to the wheel, and, sinking their own personality, grinds out grist for the daily bread of those they love.

Helen's mind would most likely have stagnated, and her soul become selfish and indolent, had she been rich and surrounded by flatterers. As it was, the straitened circumstances in which she found herself became a valuable stimulus to her emotional, volatile disposition.

Next morning, as she sat painting the fan, a determination which she had been forming for some time took shape and consistency. After lunch, when her mother, who complained of being sleepy, had gone to lie down, she descended to her uncle's apartment on the ground-floor. Laurence Ferrers's room was a reflection of his mind, and a more curious medley than its contents could not well be imagined. Although also the abode of a student and cultivated scholar, it was a great contrast to Mr. Byers's with its order and neatness.

In one corner lay a heap of newspapers of every nationality—French, Italian, English—and of every shade of opinion, from Nihilism to Conservatism. On the chimneypiece stood bottles, containing blind fish from the Mammoth Cave, sea-horses from the Mediterranean, zoophytes from the tropics, preserved in spirits of wine; while opposite the door was an old mahogany bookcase, the only piece of furniture except the table and two chairs. Through its glass doors Helen could see heaps of books and papers lying without order or tidiness. There were no curtains to the window, and the only attempt at ornaments were four plaster casts of Socrates, Voltaire, Shakespeare, and Beethoven, that stood on plain wooden brackets in the corners of the room.

Mr. Ferrers looked up with a smile as she entered.

‘I hope I am not disturbing you,’ she said, coming towards the table. ‘I know how busy you always are.’

‘I am never too busy, Helen, when you

want anything,' he answered, turning down the page of the book he was reading, and pulling up a dilapidated leather chair, out of which the stuffing was sticking. 'I knew you would come down to see me one of these days.'

'Why?'

'Because you have something to tell me.'

As he spoke, he seated himself in the cane chair standing opposite the table.

'You are right, uncle; I want your advice and opinion. I have taken a resolution.'

'When a woman has done that, it is too late to ask anyone's advice. But what is your resolution, my child?'

'You will promise not to laugh at me, uncle?'

'I will do my best.'

'I am going to become an actress.'

'You cannot be a better one than you are, for all the practical uses of life.'

'You are as good, I think, as most women.'

‘Now, uncle, I will not allow you to become sarcastic, for I am in earnest.’

‘If you are, you must explain your meaning more thoroughly; I am afraid I do not understand.’

‘Dear uncle, when I used the word “actress,” I meant to frighten you, and see what you would say. But take your coffee first,’ she said, pointing to a cup that stood beside him on the table, ‘and then we can discuss the subject comfortably.’

He did as he was directed; and pushing back his chair, crossed his legs, prepared to listen.

‘I do not want to go on the stage; I have not the *physique*, nor the training, nor the genius for that; but you know you have told me yourself I have a certain dramatic power.’

‘I am inclined to think that a mixture of races generally produces dramatic talent,’ said Mr. Ferrers meditatively. ‘But why don’t you try singing?’

‘My singing voice is not strong enough. I have practised both, and am sure I

could never fill a room singing, though I could reciting.'

'But you do not know what the drudgery, the hard work of such a life would be. And then, socially, it would do you so much harm.'

'Socially! what do I care about society? That is exactly, though, what Mr. Byers said; for I spoke to him about it in the country.'

'What did he say?'

'He strongly dissuaded me from it at first. He told me, amongst other things, that it would quite destroy my chances of matrimony!—as if I cared whether it did or no.'

'He was quite right.'

'Now, uncle, don't let me have any nonsense of that kind! I have been married once, and that is enough. As to social disabilities, the story of my birth, although I would never tell my poor dear mother so, is quite sufficient for that. My first husband did not know of it, and was good enough afterwards never to reproach my

mother with the deception; but it shall never be repeated.'

'You think, then, no man could be found to marry you in spite of the stain on your birth?' he asked, with one of his fine smiles.

'No one shall get the chance; but there, Uncle Laurence, you are becoming discursive; let us keep to the point we were discussing. Mr. Byers dissuaded me, as I tell you, at first; but I recited some things to him, and showed him I was so determined, that at last he yielded, and gave me a letter to an individual—a friend of his—who is a professional, and gives lessons in elocution.'

She handed Mr. Ferrers a letter as she spoke.

'Horace Crofts,' he said, reading the address. 'I know him. I often meet him at the Eclectic. I suppose you could not be in better hands. He makes a handsome fortune out of attending fashionable parties, and giving what he calls "musical sketches." I should think he knew all about it, but he is no real artist.'

‘I do not need a real artist to teach me the drudgery.’

There was a pause, during which Laurence Ferrers took a sip from the cup of coffee beside him.

‘My dear,’ he then went on, ‘I am the last person to dissuade anyone from following an artistic career Voltaire has declared “Le travail éloigne de nous trois grands maux — l’ennui, le vice, et le besoin.” From personal experience, I can bear testimony to the happiness the pursuit of any art bestows on a man; but to become an actor or actress, appetite, energy, and muscular power are requisite above all things. I would never recommend anyone, therefore, to take to it unless possessed of these qualifications; after all, recitation of a high order is acting. I always told you, you had the divine spark; but you do not eat, and have no lungs.’

‘I think,’ she said diffidently, ‘I should have more purpose now to carry me along.’

‘You mean that you have a stimulus, and could, therefore, give more devotion to your art. It is not enough. Work of that kind, like a sharp sword, wears out the scabbard, and destroys a woman, body and soul.’

‘Don’t be afraid, uncle. I am much tougher than you think, and am sure the best thing to make me strong and happy would be plenty to do and fresh air. Fancy, if I made money we could take a little cottage in the country, where we could hear the birds sing, and gather buttercups! I am sure, then, my mother would get quite strong.’

‘Remember the arduousness of the life—hard and persistent study, late hours at night, excitement, annoyance. The delights of success are manifold, but the disappointment and weariness, especially to such a woman as you, overwhelming. To begin with, you would shrink from the publicity——’

‘I would shrink from nothing, if my purpose were attained.’ A flame passed into



her face as she spoke. 'What matters the adverse criticism of the world? All scruples of that kind are over for me.'

'What do you mean, "over for you"? Don't you care, for instance, what your friends at Stourton will say?'

'I am no longer a child; and if my friends at Stourton are not attached enough to approve of what I do, they must cease to be my friends—that is all about it.'

'Then you are quite prepared for adverse criticism.'

'Quite!'

'And your mother? What will she say? Are you going to tell her?'

'If I am going to devote myself in earnest to my work, I must work at home as well as with Horace Crofts; and my mind is really so thoroughly made up now, no one could shake my resolution.'

'You had better then, I suppose, tell her at once; but don't let me be there to hear—that is all I have got to say.'

Laurence shrugged his shoulders, with a laugh, as he spoke.

‘I will tell her after her game of cards to-night. If I let you off being present, however, uncle, you must promise me not to talk of the king as “that knave,” when you play it, and you must express no disrespect for Henry V.’

‘My dear Helen! if it is to be any help to you, I will talk of the silly old folk at Fröhsdorf as “le roi et la reine,” and I will express sentiments almost “Vendéen” in their intense loyalty; but remember, as we age we become crabbed and narrow. I am prejudiced myself, only in an opposite direction. I am afraid you have a difficult job before you.’

‘It has to be done; there is no other way out of the difficulty. I must go now and prepare for the ordeal.’

That evening her mother was more than usually irritable, and it was as much as Laurence Ferrers could do to keep his promise. Helen sat in a corner bending over her work. Whenever there were dif-

difficulties around her, and the future looked particularly dark, she took to her needle as a solace and consolation. She worked with feverish impatience and uncertain touch, glancing every now and then uneasily at the two card-players, watching their heads move backwards and forwards above the green-shaded lamp. She could not help remarking how fragile her mother looked, with her heavy eyelids showing the many tears the dimmed eyes had wept, and the deep lines round her mouth, signs of the storms she had been through.

The young woman smiled when she heard the tone of deference with which her uncle spoke of the kings and queens.

Madame de Carrel herself was astonished at last, and looking up suspiciously, said :

‘It is the first time I ever heard you call the cards by their right names, Laurence ; what does it mean?’

‘It means that I regret my past transgressions,’ he answered, giving an imperceptible wink and shrug of the shoulders in Helen’s direction.

When the game was over and Laurence had gone, Madame de Carrel sank into her arm-chair for the usual chat and evening prayer with which mother and daughter invariably finished the day. The younger woman immediately folded up her work, and prepared to dash into the subject that was uppermost in her thoughts.

‘Mother, you and I cannot earn enough money by our painting and work. We must try something else.’

‘What do you mean, Helen?’ and Madame de Carrel looked up like a frightened child.

‘I mean, dear mother, what I say.’

‘But you have told me yourself you could make £100 a quarter from your painting.’

‘I unintentionally misrepresented facts, dear mother. It was in the season, and I hoped the same demand would continue; but alas! I find it does not. It is better I should make a full confession. I felt so sure it would not continue, and that new fashions or new inventions would spoil my market, that before I went last time to

Stourton I made up my mind something else must be done; and I have decided on trying to cultivate my taste for reciting. You remember, mother, the pages of poetry I could repeat once by heart, and how fond I was of dressing up and doing the characters in Corneille's and Racine's plays.'

'You want, then, to act—to show yourself on the stage!' Madame de Carrel's voice rose sharp and shrill.

'Hardly that. I do not intend to go on the stage, but to recite in private houses for money.'

'Yes, for everyone to stare at you, make observations about you, and destroy your chances of an honourable settlement in life. I cannot allow it—I really cannot, Helen.'

'*Petite mère,*' said the young woman, rising and coming to her mother gently and lovingly, yet with a certain listlessness, as though she had to deal with a recalcitrant child who had often been troublesome before, 'you must not withstand me in this; I have set my heart on it.'

'Of course you have; you set your heart

on everything I do not approve of;’ and Madame de Carrel’s lip trembled.

‘You must not say that, darling. I am sure I think of your happiness before everything;’ with a caressing gesture she sank into her favourite position on the stool at her mother’s feet, her arms resting on her mother’s lap. ‘This determination of mine is for the sake of the happiness of both of us; we must have more money to live, and—and I must have some work to do.’

‘Why do you need work? Surely we are not so poor that you need slave yourself out of all your good looks and happiness?’ and Madame de Carrel looked up at her daughter with a worn, aged expression on her delicate features while tears stood in her eyes.

‘Mother, I will not let you cry; and you must listen to reason.’

‘Reason generally seems to represent your own way,’ said Madame de Carrel, wiping her eyes with a delicate lace handkerchief, which Helen could not help recollecting had cost her half the profit of the last fan she painted. She became

more determined than ever to resist her mother's objections, and to persevere in the course she had taken. Putting up her hand, therefore, she gently drew Madame de Carrel's down, and stroking it with her own, said resolutely :

' You are unjust to me. I want to do the best for both of us. All idea of matrimony I have definitely and entirely renounced. I never will marry a Protestant, and Roman Catholics do not abound in England.'

' Then, I suppose, it will be the same old story over again ! What difference can it make to a sensible Englishman, that according to the rules made by that wicked parvenu and despot, Napoleon, you are not born within the strict limits of the law ? Of course you will begin about that next, and reproach me for destroying your happiness.'

Madame de Carrel, having shifted her ground with all the inconsistency of a child, bent down her head and began to sob.

' Come, come ! this will never do,' the

young woman said, turning very pale, and rising from where she sat. 'We will not discuss the question any further to-night, or indeed at all, until we can do so in a calmer spirit. I will read the evening prayer, mother, and let you go to bed. I think you are tired,' putting the lamp on the little table beside her chair.

She read her mother some of the simple prayers of her Church, and then kneeling down, asked for the benediction of Heaven on them both.

Madame de Carrel had quite regained her composure towards the end; and when the gentle voice stopped, she said, stretching out her hands:

'Perhaps I am unreasonable, Helen, but I have to battle against the prejudice of a lifetime. Forgive me if I have been unreasonable. I am only fit to be by myself just now. Good-night, my child; to think that we De Carrels should be reduced to such straits!' and kissing Helen on the forehead, she collected her paraphernalia of scent-bottle, fan, prayer-book, and handker-



chief, and vanished through the doorway into her bedroom.

Helen sat some time longer, her head bent over her work, deftly and quickly putting the bright-coloured pieces together. She had been so much accustomed to remember the necessity of occupation that, however troubled or sad, she never thought of sitting idle. Then she was still in the spring-time of youth and energy; the folded blades had not yet pierced the earth, but the flower and fruition of her endeavours were already anticipated. Her mother saw but the mist, and the rain, and the cold sunless days that must precede that result.





## CHAPTER X.

‘ Et vous, longues études d’un art que j’aimais tant, rien ne restera de vous après moi (avec douleur)—rien de nous survit à nous autres—rien que le souvenir.’  
—ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR.

**N**CE Helen had put her hand to the plough, there was no looking back; she was determined to pursue her idea unflinchingly, in spite of all opposition. Even in her childhood, Madame de Carrel never had had much influence over her; Helen was infinitely the stronger character of the two. The young woman had never, however, measured accurately her mother’s shortcomings until she discovered the deception that had been practised on the Count de Ferrin. Though loving her as

tenderly and devotedly as ever, their relations towards one another were changed from that day, and Helen determined that for the future she should never influence her intentions or resolutions.

As time went on, the change became more marked. Helen gradually assumed the position of arbiter and manager in the conduct of their affairs, while her mother occupied the negative *rôle* of acquiescence and dependence. Every now and then Madame de Carrel, with—as she called it—her superior knowledge of the world, protested against some proposal or resolve; but having no tenacity of purpose, after making her daughter and herself very miserable for some hours, she would passively lay down her arms and acknowledge herself conquered; keeping up for days, however, a plaintive lachrymose war of words.

On going into her bedroom next morning to ask after her mother's health, Madame de Carrel answered peevishly that she was very nervous and ill; adding, after a pause:

‘I see you have on your bonnet, Helen. Where are you going?’

‘I am going to take Mr. Byers’s letter of introduction to Horace Crofts.’

The old lady sighed, and turned away. Her daughter, not wishing to re-open the discussion, kissed her on the forehead and left.

Her footsteps made an inspiring accompaniment to her thoughts, as she walked along towards Chester Terrace, Regent’s Park, where Horace Crofts lived. She was too young, too energetic, to be sad, in spite of opposition and anxiety about the future.

Mr. Crofts was not at home, she was informed at the door; so leaving her card and Mr. Byers’s letter, she asked the servant to give it to his master when he came in, and turned her steps home again.

In spite of being told by one of the great teachers of humanity that ‘There’s a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we may,’ we all of us endeavour to mould and fashion them according to our own conceit. The powers in Helen’s life just now were

the will and wish of Horace Crofts to serve her, Mr. Byers's ability to influence that will and wish, and her own capacity to profit by these combined forces. No struggling and striving could erase what was already 'written on the iron leaf,' yet Helen worked herself into a perfect fever of excitement.

She was down early next morning, on purpose to see the letters, hoping to find one from him who held the balance of her future in his hands. There was nothing, however, but a line from Miss Byers, telling her she had forgotten her umbrella; and did she want it at once, or would it do when John next went to town, as it would cost half-a-crown to send it by train? She ended by a lamentation over her absence, which Helen felt to be genuine; and a feeling of pleasure for a moment overcame the disappointment she experienced in not hearing from Horace Crofts.

Next morning she repeated the experiment, and trembling with excitement found a letter, written from the Eclectic Club, Pall

Mall, which she immediately saw was from the arbiter of her Fate.

‘Mr. Crofts presents his compliments to the Countess de Ferrin, and could she make it convenient to call on him, either at his private residence between twelve and one o’clock, or at the theatre between three and five?’

Helen felt a shiver at the bare idea of the theatre, and elected unhesitatingly to go to his house.

Horace Crofts was a man not mentally but physically on the *heavy* side of fifty. He was tall, pale-faced, with large bony hands, which he used with wonderful power and execution, sometimes to thump the piano, sometimes to gesticulate. He was always profusely scented, and interlarded his conversation with French, to show his knowledge of every side of intellectual and social life. His technique and manipulation were first-rate, but if it had not been for her own taste and Laurence Ferrer’s admonitions he would have

spoilt Helen's style—when she was sufficiently advanced, that is to say, for the formation of a style. He had been accustomed all his life to bluster and lay down the law, especially to the female portion of society, and that female portion of the many-headed hydra which is certainly not the most modest or the most dignified. Helen's quiet reserved manner, however, made an impression on him, and he soon began to discuss her affairs quietly and unpretentiously.

'I see by this,' laying his hand on Mr. Byers's letter, 'that your father was French, your mother English: a *mélange de races* is a good thing for the production of artistic power. Your appearance is good, too. Alphonse Karr, the best theatrical critic they have on the other side the water, says, "C'est une grande chose pour une femme sur la scène d'être autre"—different from everyone else, you know.'

Seeing the young woman blush beneath his criticisms, he changed his tone, and said more softly:

‘I beg your pardon. I forgot!’

He did not mention what he had forgotten, but Helen mentally filled the blank.

After this he went into practical business affairs, and arranged to give her lessons in elocution and recitation, at a sum which seemed to Helen very high. She did not know that, in consequence of Mr. Byers’s letter, he had reduced his charges by one half. After this was arranged, and the day and hour at which she was to come for her first lesson, he showed her with much courtesy and many bows to the door, and she returned home.

For some weeks the time passed quickly enough; Helen’s life attained a new purpose. She rose early in the morning to read over her parts; then, for health’s sake, took a walk—her book with her; and in the evening studied again, while Laurence Ferrers and her mother played cards. Three times a week she went to Horace Crofts, and on the other days took the same hours to work at her painting, trying to earn money enough to pay for her lessons.



One day she came home very much elated. Horace Crofts had congratulated her on her progress, and had told her that she had recited Queen Katherine's speech in 'Henry VIII.' as well as he had ever heard it done. 'Your fortune is made,' he said, 'if you improve like this; good recitation consists of three things — first, "action;" second, "action;" third, "action;"—which is to say "manner." You have acquired that. But now, you must remember never to attempt anything beyond your range. Your voice is naturally musical; when you strain it, it becomes harsh. By the autumn, I am quite sure, if you go ahead as you are doing, I shall be able to get engagements for you. Meantime stick to the drudgery, the polish will come soon enough.'

As she walked home in high good-humour after this interview, Helen remarked advertisements on every hoarding, of the representations that were being given just then by a great foreign actress. She had often seen her name before, and thought she would like to hear her, especially in

‘Adrienne Lecouvreur,’ the play announced for that night.

On reaching home, she suggested it to her mother. Madame de Carrel refused at once, so far as she herself was concerned; but she added, peevishly:

‘Both you and Laurence seem so taken up just now with theatrical matters, that it is best for you to go together.’

One of the principal difficulties and trials in Helen’s path since she began her lessons, had been her mother’s innuendoes and complaints. Although the old lady had consented at first, it had been with a bad grace, and she never missed an opportunity of making depreciatory remarks.

As I said before, however, Helen had put her hand to the plough, and for her there was no looking back. Laurence, also, once he had given his countenance to the scheme, was determined to support her to the end, and would often turn the current of his sister’s complaints into another channel.

‘Dear mother, we shall not enjoy it nearly

so much if you don't come!' the young woman said caressingly.

'I am not well enough—I assure you I am not.'

She looked delicate and fragile enough to make the excuse a valid one.

'We will give it up, then.'

'No, no; don't on my account. There is Laurence; I will ask him to take you if you don't yourself.'

A step was heard at that moment ascending the stairs, and Mr. Ferrers entered.

In answer to the request preferred, he immediately assented, being very fond of the play and particularly anxious to see the great actress.

'Go, then, and get the tickets,' said Helen, whose spirits began again to rise at the prospect.

'What am I to take?'

'Stalls, of course! I am going to do the thing in style. No cabs for me, either. Order, please, a brougham, uncle; Cinderella and her pumpkin is prose compared to the splendour I shall display to-night.'

Laurence did as he was told.

There were very few stalls, however, left; so he could get nothing that was not far back.

‘Never mind, so long as we have secured some;’ and the young woman clasped her hands with delight.

The play, as we have said, was ‘Adrienne Lecouvreur,’ and the scene between the lovers, when Adrienne speaks the beautiful lines, ‘Deux pigeons s’aimaient, d’amour tendre,’ was being represented. The impassioned words, falling like pearls from the lips of the actress who spoke them, riveted the attention of the audience. Helen, amongst others, leant forward, her soul in her eyes. Suddenly the rustle and *frou-frou* of a lady’s dress sounded behind. She turned, and saw a stately-looking woman standing close to her. Her tall figure was enveloped in a long red plush mantle, trimmed with black fur, that set off her remarkable beauty to the best advantage, while the band of diamonds on her head did not flash more brilliantly than her dark eyes.

The new-comer hesitated and stopped as she entered, then turned to address some one behind. Helen started, for in that person she recognised Sir Maurice Perceval. In obedience evidently to the lady's request, he passed to the front and led the way; a pale thin man, whom Helen concluded must be the lady's husband, followed them both. The young woman watched their movements with some interest, and did not hear much of the rest of the love-scene between Adrienne and Maurice de Saxe. She saw the party take possession of their seats several rows farther in front, and watched Sir Maurice's fair-haired, close-cropped head continually bent close to his companion's, talking with an air of absorbed attention, as if, for the time being, she were the one woman in the world for him. The two heads seemed to come between Helen and the stage. She could not look beyond them. When she endeavoured to rivet her attention on the Maurice acting, Maurice in the stalls immediately drew her wandering eyes away.

When the act was over, he and the gentleman on the other side of the lady rose, and leant against the row of seats in front; Maurice, opera-glass in hand, looked round the house with that listless easy confidence mixture in a certain social strata ever gives. Just as he was turning to sit down again, his eye fell on Helen and Mr. Ferrers. In an instant he made his way out, and came towards them.

‘You would hardly believe it, but, crowded as the house is, yours is the only face I know here. They must all be foreigners or people from the provinces. Have you remarked them?’

As he spoke, he sat down in the stall beside her, that happened to be vacant.

‘I am afraid my acquaintance is so small that I am accustomed to the disappointment of not seeing anyone I know.’

She did not intend her words as a rebuff, but as soon as she saw him enter, with his irreproachable shirt-front and general air of listless languor, Helen felt as though he inhabited a different world to hers, and was

unconsciously and unjustifiably annoyed thereat.

‘Why do you always snub me, Countess de Ferrin?’ he said, leaning back in his seat, with a smile.

‘I did not intend to this time, I assure you.’

‘I am not to take the deed for the will, then?’

‘No, please don’t! Both deed and will were perfectly innocent. When do you return from Stourton?’

‘My leave was up last Tuesday. I am on duty in barracks again now.’

‘I didn’t know,’ she said blankly.

‘No, I dare say you didn’t; but I beg to inform you that we soldiers sometimes do our duty—though we don’t look like it.’

‘I never said you didn’t. Now *you* are snubbing *me*!’

‘I did not mean to, really,’ he said, bending forward with solicitude.

‘Your will and deed were perfectly innocent also?’

‘For a wonder,’ he murmured under his breath.

‘How is Lady Perceval?’ she asked, as though she had not heard, and the conversation became discursive. She introduced Mr. Ferrers, then discussed the people at Stourton, London, the play, the actress—talking with more ease to him than she would have thought possible when she saw him enter a short time before.

He seemed determined to make himself agreeable, and only left when he saw the rightful owner of the stall he occupied returning. As he shook hands to say good-bye, he asked her if he might call.

‘You are always at home on Sunday afternoons, like everyone else, I suppose.’

‘Yes ; ah no, though, by-the-bye ! My uncle and I are going to hear Vespers at St. George’s Cathedral next Sunday.’

‘I will take my chance, then, some afternoon ;’ and he went back to his seat.

Helen turned to Mr. Ferrers when Maurice had gone, as though expecting him to make some observation. He kept his glasses



fixed on the stage, and said nothing. Her attention, also, was arrested by the words the actress was declaiming:

‘Je renfermerai là mon ivresse et ma fierté ; je ne me vanterai pas de votre amour et de votre gloire ; je ne vous admirerai que tout haut comme tout le monde.’

When it was over, Sir Maurice and his companion went out the other side, and Helen saw them passing on in front—she leaning on his arm, he bending down talking to her. On reaching the bottom of the staircase leading from the theatre, they stopped; and when she and her uncle approached, the young woman was conscious they were talking of her.

As they came nearer Sir Maurice changed the conversation, at the same time drawing his companion’s furred cloak carefully round her to protect her from the current of air that rushed through the swing-door when it opened.

Having no powdered footman to wait for, and leaving no glass slipper behind for love-lorn prince to pick up, Cinderella passed

on into the flare of the gas-lit streets, amid the shouts of porters and policemen, the noise of carriages and stamping of horses. She entered the brougham they had hired for the occasion, and lay back, while the actress's last words re-echoed in her brain:

‘ Rien de nous survit à nous autres—rien que le souvenir.’





## CHAPTER XI.

‘I hear a voice—I see a radiant light—  
A hand held out which stills this aching breast—  
“Come unto me, and I will give you rest.”’

**T**WO days after this visit to the theatre, Helen and her mother were sitting together in the afternoon—the younger woman, in a brown holland apron, busy at a little table close to the window, painting, while a bunch of daffodils stood in a glass opposite her, and a paint-box lay open, with its mixture of bright colours and brushes ready for use. Madame de Carrel had drawn her armchair close to the fire, and was thoroughly enjoying a yellow-covered volume, one of the latest productions of a celebrated French novelist. Visitors were a rare occurrence at

Russell Place ; neither of the ladies were therefore prepared to receive any when the door was suddenly thrown open, and the servant-girl announced Sir Maurice Perceval.

Madame de Carrel took off her spectacles, laid her book in her lap, and turned round with a start. Helen had told her of their meeting him at the theatre, but had never mentioned the possibility of the fashionable guardsman coming to call ; for she imagined when he mentioned his intention of doing so, that it was only a form of politeness that meant nothing further.

Their little room at Russell Place had seemed to Helen adequate and commodious enough until now ; but when she saw Maurice enter, with his proud grace and easy courtesy, she was conscious for the first time of its shabbiness and smallness—and, though usually self-possessed and calm, she felt perturbed for a moment. Laying down her brush directly, however, the young woman held out her hand with perfect frankness, and then introduced him to her mother.

Madame de Carrel lifted her head, with its crown of white hair that made her look like the portrait of one of her ancestors, and bowed with gentle dignity.

‘You told me I might call some afternoon, so you see I have availed myself of your permission, Countess de Ferrin,’ Maurice said, as he took Helen’s hand, and then turned and saluted Madame de Carrel.

‘I hardly thought you would do so, however;’ and she sat down with a slight flush on her cheeks.

‘Why not? What a humbug you must think me! I assure you I have taken a great deal of trouble to look you out in the “Red Book,” and at last found you by looking under Mr. Ferrers’s name. I knew you lived with him.’

‘I *am* astonished,’ she said banteringly. It evidently was fated from the beginning of their acquaintance, that Helen and Maurice were ever to be on the defensive; and, certainly, if her object had been to pique him and excite his interest.

she could not have done so more effectually.

‘Your daughter is always so severe.’

As he spoke, the young man turned with an expostulatory gesture to Madame de Carrel, who was listening in wonderment to the conversation, unable to realize the intimacy that a few days’ intercourse in the country effects. Besides, she had not seen this sparkle in Helen’s eye or this flush on her cheek for so long.

‘My daughter told me she had made your acquaintance at Stourton,’ said the old lady, a little on her dignity.

‘Yes; and I hope it is fated we should continue it in London. I am back now for some weeks; we are stationed at the Tower, miles away from civilization—but it is such a jolly old place! Have you ever seen it, Countess de Ferrin?’

‘No; my mother and I have done none of the London sights yet.’

‘You must come down and have tea there with me some afternoon. You saw

that lady I was with the other night?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'Don't say anything against her; she is my cousin.'

'I didn't intend to. I was only going to remark how very beautiful she is.'

'Laura—yes, I suppose she is,' he said, slowly looking at the fire. 'Well, I was going to add that I would invite her and her husband the same day; they want to see the Tower also. By-the-bye, she said something the other evening about knowing you, or knowing of you. Directly I mentioned your name, she said she had heard it before.'

'Really!' said Madame de Carrel, interested. 'Who was she?'

'My cousin, Mrs. Bellisle—*née* Laura di Guardia.'

Madame de Carrel shook her head, perplexed.

'I dare say she has heard of us in Paris,' said Helen quickly, taking up her paintbrush. 'Will you forgive me if I go on

with my work? It has to be delivered finished this evening.'

'Certainly;' and with amazement he watched the small hand with its slender fingers, blue veins, and its soft white frill at the wrist, as it passed lightly over the satin on which she was painting, while the afternoon light fell on her bent head, shining through the dusky glory of her hair. 'I told her,' he went on, taking up the thread of his discourse, 'that you were going to St. George's Cathedral on Sunday; and, would you believe it, she said she would like to go too. She is Roman Catholic.'

'I suppose so,' said Helen drily. 'Is she going?'

'Yes; and I am to accompany her. I should be sorry to say anything against your sex, but, Countess de Ferrin, have you ever seen a flock of sheep follow one another over a hedge?'

'I never followed anyone over a hedge in my life.'

'I should not think you did; but you



are the exception that "proves the rule." I have sometimes, but rarely, seen an independent-minded sheep who would not follow the others.'

Helen laughed.

'Are you going?' she then asked saucily. 'I have no doubt it would do you good.'

'You hope to convert me, do you? The Percevals were Roman Catholic once.'

'Yes; Lady Perceval told me so. It was in those days that you distinguished yourselves.'

'Perhaps so—it is a great power; but my mother hardly expressed approval of that portion of our history.'

'No, I cannot say she did; but I am not accustomed to hear much good of my religion in England.'

'I suppose not: let us change the subject. What beautiful lilac that is!'

'Yes. You must not think that you landed proprietors are the only people who have estates. That pot of lily of the valley has given me more pleasure this week, I

dare say, than all your green-houses have given you.'

She pointed with the handle of her brush, as she spoke, to a pot in which the delicate white blossoms peeped out amidst the green leaves.

'I dare say, then, I am afraid my green-houses are rather a misery than a pleasure to me.' And getting up, he prepared to go. 'Shall we meet on Sunday?'

'Perhaps,' she answered, holding out her hand; 'but St. George's will be very crowded. They are going to give the "Stabat Mater."'

Shaking hands with Madame de Carrel, he went.

When Mr. Ferrers and Helen reached Southwark Cathedral on the following Sunday evening, the daylight was still shining through the long lancet windows, making the lights within look mystic and ghostly. The silver lamps in front of the shrines glimmered like stars in space

through the clouds of incense. Pictures of the Passion of our Lord, hung on each pillar, while high against the painted window and dark arch of the chancel rose the crucifix, with the figure of the Virgin, and two angels with outstretched wings. Above the iron gate stood the golden lamb of the Passion, shining like a bright sign of reconciliation and love from the gloomy darkness of the dome.

The priest's voice sounded from the chancel clear as a clarion, at one moment challenging the devotion of the congregation, then sinking into depths of pathetic supplication.

The angel with outstretched wings, the crucifix, the praying figures—all expressed that aspiration towards something beyond earthly things which is the best part of religion. The organ burst forth, filling every niche and corner with its trembling waves of sound; and the deep voice of a man, answered by the flute-like singing of a boy, came floating towards them, while a white-robed priest advanced in

front of the altar and swung a censer. The subtle perfume, the throbbing of the organ, the flickering of the candles, lifted Helen, like great wings, from the earth. Resurrection, the spring, the renewed beginning of life—thoughts of resuscitation and regeneration took possession of her fatigued and flagging being. She listened to the music, watched the clouds of incense floating upwards, and one of those moments of emotion came over her—moments which make us long to begin a new life, to close the read volume as worthless and insipid, and open a new one with illumined pages, full of noble thoughts and deeds.

Mr. Ferrers sat beside her, a sarcastic smile on his face. Once, while earnestly employed in telling her beads and passing the rosary through her fingers, Helen's eyes, by a magnetism she could not have explained, were attracted to the other side of the aisle. She started as she caught sight of Sir Maurice Perceval. He was at the end of the opposite row of people, and

stood leaning against the pillar, watching her attentively.

Helen looked until her eyes pierced the gloom, and detected Mrs. Bellisle standing beside him ; then they returned to her book again, while the organ swelled and pealed, and the men's and boys' voices poured forth in unison.

As they were walking slowly down the aisle with the stream of people, she heard Mr. Ferrers's voice behind her talking with Maurice.

‘ Picturesque, wasn't it ? ’

‘ Yes ; well worth seeing,’ answered the younger man. ‘ The music, too, was good.’

‘ Isn't it wonderful the comfort they extract from such empty shows ? ’

Helen turned and gave her uncle a glance of such pained distress, that he bent forward apologetically and was silent until they reached the door. There Maurice pressed forward through the crowd, and, taking her hand, thanked her for having let him know of the service, as he had enjoyed it so much.

His behaviour had given her a sense of aloofness. He seemed to think himself superior because he did not believe, and to look down on her because she did. Throbbing and full as she was of the new life aroused within her, his words hurt her all the more.

He saw that something was wrong, and changed the subject.

‘I met a mutual friend yesterday.’

‘Who?’

‘Mr. Byers. He was only up for the day. I told him I had seen you. He said he would have called at Russell Place, but that he found at the last that he had no time, as he was going down again that evening. He is coming up again soon.’

‘Now then, Maurice, there is only one hansom, and I want you to take me home.’

The young guardsman turned, and found his cousin standing beside him.

‘Will you allow me, Laura, to introduce the Countess de Ferrin?—Mrs. Bellisle. I had better go and secure the hansom, or

some one else will run off with it. Can I call one for you?' he added, turning to Helen.

'Thank you, my uncle and I will walk a little way.'

'There is not another to be got for love or money,' said Mrs. Bellisle, turning with a bright smile to Helen. 'I saw you at the French play the other night, I think?'

'Yes; it was a wonderful piece of acting, was it not?'

'I always enjoy the French play on that account. But how dreadful the dying scene is! And that horrid woman, too—Princess de—what was her name?'

'There is only one hansom, Laura,' said the thin, pale man Helen had seen at the theatre, appearing like a ghost behind his brilliant wife.

'Maurice and I will go home in that, and you can follow in another,' she answered in the most off-hand fashion. 'You will get one round the corner; there is a cab-stand.'

The thin individual seemed to take this treatment as a matter of course, and walked away, while the lady held out her hand to Helen to say good-bye.

‘I must be off now. I hope we shall meet again somewhere.’

With a rustle of silk and lace, leaving a scent of patchouli behind her, she vanished. As niece and uncle walked along through the evening twilight, they saw her and Maurice pass in a hansom, while shortly afterwards Mr. Bellisle appeared, following in their wake. Helen could not repress a smile.







## CHAPTER XII.

‘ Those days were sweet,  
And none will come just like them.’

**I**T was the beginning of May, and again we find Helen in the Maplewood Lodgedrawing-room. Again her eyes were greeted by the brilliantly coloured carpet, the crochet antimacassar, and the green and gold paper ; but, as before, instead of perturbing and discomposing her artistic perceptions, the scene around her seemed to have a soothing effect. She lay on her sofa watching the waving of the curtain in the breeze that blew in at the open window, listening to the song of the birds outside, and inhaling

the fragrance of the spring, while even the Arab in cross-stitch seemed to bring repose for her weary brain on the point of his lance and in the tread of his prancing horse.

Outside, the scene was much changed since the first time she had beheld it. The elm-trees were clothed in leaves, and made a screen of green and gold, against which their trunks stood out dark and twisted. She could catch glimpses of velvety green uplands that looked blue in the shadows, and on which the white-fleeced sheep browsed or lay in happy laziness, lulled by the faint tinkle of their bells. Close at hand, the flower-beds were a blaze of colour with pinks and pansies, while the air was heavy with the scent of wallflowers and stocks.

It was nearly mid-day, and the sunshine was falling like a golden cloud into the room. She started once or twice, thinking she heard Miss Byers coming to shut it out, and took a guilty pleasure in watching the light as it crept towards her, glinting off the old furniture, lurking in the corners, touching the

precious green carpet with its golden flame; gradually it shone full upon her, bathing her in a warm stream of rays—first her feet, then her hands, then her hair, making her shiver and tingle to her finger-tips under its fiery kisses. In the March sunshine the room seemed cold and comfortless to her; the May sunshine awoke a delicious sensation of life, which seemed to proclaim her kinship with the plants and flowers outside, by her returning strength and expanding powers.

A small table had been placed beside her, with a blotter, pens, ink, and paper; and again, as on the first time we saw our Helen, she was engaged in writing to her mother. But evidently she had not proceeded far with her composition, for the first sheet lay on the open blotter on her lap, while the ink had long ago dried on the pen she held in her hand—that hand in which the fresh new blood was circulating through the blue veins under the delicate skin.

Ah ! how good it was to be here among these kind people, out of the smoke and

noise of the city, resting all the morning amid sunshine and flowers, instead of repeating with Horace Crofts; and talking quietly or reading every evening, instead of playing cards with her mother and uncle.

A feeling of remorse quickly succeeded to this thought. 'Poor mother, who loves me better than anything in the world.' And, full of good resolves, Helen took up pen and paper and determined to write her a long letter—ending with a great many harmless inaccuracies. That she was longing to be home again—that London was much brighter and pleasanter than the country, etc., etc.

Hardly had she begun before the door opened. Helen started, thinking it was Amelia come to shut the sunshine out; but on looking up she saw it was Mr. Byers, carrying a spray of dew-washed acacia.

'There's a subject for you,' he said, holding it up.

Helen instinctively stretched out her hand to take it.

'That tree at the back of the house is

worth seeing. It's a mass of blossom,' he added, giving it to her. 'You have hardly been long enough back with us yet to show you all the spring sights. I really declare,' bending down and looking into her face, 'you are getting a colour already. But what does this pen and paper mean? Did not the doctor give strict orders that you were to do nothing?'

'I am only writing to my mother.'

'Ah! well, I think she deserves that! I thought at one time she would not yield to my persuasions to let you come. How prettily I talked about the Legitimists and Henri V., and the rest of it.'

'You behaved most diplomatically.'

'At one time I thought Ferrers had spoilt all by audibly calling the poor old boy "*un pieux farçeur*;" but I think I quieted her down.'

'Uncle Laurence was as anxious for me to come as you were, but he loves to tease my mother.'

'Never mind; we have got you here now, and intend to keep you.'

‘How lovely this is!’ she said, throwing her head back on the sofa-cushion, and holding up the spray of acacia. ‘I believe the sight of it has given me a month’s health. But see!’ as she lifted a blossom from her lap; ‘we must not drop things about and make the place untidy, or Amelia will not approve. By-the-bye, where is she?’

‘In the kitchen with Anne, making preparations for the lawn-tennis party this afternoon.’

‘A lawn-tennis party! She never told me about it!’

‘That’s her craft. Ah, you women! you women! ’Pon my word, now that I am behind the scenes, I don’t know how any man ever escapes. The relentless vigour with which the campaign is carried on when once two or three of the other sex make up their mind to marry “a man and a maid,” is truly terrific for the onlooker! There’s Amelia, a sensible woman enough in her way, though I do chaff her now and then, and call her “straightener”-in-general to the village of Stourton, and she certainly is

firmly convinced herself that she never saw through a glass darkly! Well, there's Amelia, as I say, has taken it into her head that she will make up a match between Maurice Perceval and Margaret Corbett, and, oblivious of discretion, propriety, decency—everything—she is endeavouring to draw those two young people to destruction.'

'Why to destruction, dear Mr. Byers?' asked Helen, with a tremor in her voice, laying the lilac in her lap, and looking at him.'

'Because I think, in nine cases out of ten, marriage is destruction!' and the old gentleman put on a judicial expression of face, and, crossing his legs, seemed delighted to prepare for a discussion. 'Why, Amelia has actually had the hardihood to try it on two or three times with a hardened old sinner like me. Thank you for nothing. Celibacy, as the Frenchman says, may be a mistake; but it is one that can be rectified at any time.'

Helen laughed.

‘Are the Percevals and Corbetts both coming, then, this afternoon?’

‘Of course they are. What do you think all the cream and sponge-cakes are for? Bread cast upon the waters? Not at all; that is not Amelia’s way. They are all baits—all baits, madam, to catch this unfortunate fish.’

And Mr. Byers rose, and putting one hand under his coat-tails, raised the other in a declamatory fashion, after the manner of the great Mr. Pickwick, while he began to walk up and down the room.

‘But what if Amelia, on this occasion, should see through a glass darkly, and be mistaken; for, between ourselves, I don’t think the fish you mention is one so easily caught.’

‘Neither do I; but Amelia thinks that unhappy young girl well lost for the great cause.’

‘I am sure Margaret was beginning to care for Sir Maurice the last time I was down here.’

‘How do you know?’



‘I could tell by the way she watched him, and listened to everything he said. And then—yes, I first knew for certain,’ the young woman went on meditatively, ‘that Sunday we went to Stourton chapel. I remember seeing her brush her hair, and prepare herself before the glass, when she knew he was expected. She did not know I was looking.’

‘Ah, you women—you women!’ said Mr. Byers, with a laugh. ‘Lord, what fools we mortals be! By “mortals” I mean, of course, men, for you all belong to the angelic host; but,’ he added, ‘it is sure to be all right. I never knew one of my sex who was not to be caught by devotion.’

‘I sincerely hope it will be so.’ And Helen, as she spoke, turned and fiercely beat and pushed her pillows into shape. ‘But suppose it isn’t?’

‘Don’t bother your head about it, my child. My experience goes to prove that morning dews and women’s tears are equally quickly dried. But now, tell me about yourself, for I have never had time

to ask you. What has been wrong with you?"

'I don't know—overwork, I think.'

'I am very good at diagnosis generally; and I believe when I saw you in London, you were suffering from what the Germans call *weltschmerz*.'

'What is that?'

'It is a disease that attacks people when they find they cannot reconcile the economy of the world with their preconceived notions of what it ought to be. At your age, *weltschmerz* ought to be cured by copious doses of "iron." At mine, it cures itself; for I can afford to acknowledge that it is a hard, miserable world, and yet that I love it. It has done me plenty of bad turns, and yet I take an interest in it and its fortunes. I once wished to show it its errors, and tried to reclaim it from some of them; but it left me sitting by the roadside and went its way. And so I gave up trying to improve it mentally, but I do so physically whenever I get a chance, hoping that moral improvement may come after. What would

Mrs. Brotherton say if she heard me state that I believe in the material rather than the spiritual edification of mankind? A healthy happy life is the best offering we can make to the Being who cares for our welfare. So, Countess Helen, I shall expect you to get well and strong, to eat plenty, and to put your *weltschmerz* under your pillow and sleep upon it.'

'Here is Miss Byers to care for our material improvement, at all events,' added Helen, as, armed with a basket and a large pair of scissors, a black poke bonnet on her head and gardening gloves on her hands, Amelia entered the room.

'I am off out to get some flowers for this afternoon. How do you feel, child, now you are down? Better? that's all right. I am not going to let you mope here all this afternoon, I can tell you. You will either have your sofa down out on the lawn, or John can give you an arm and put you in a comfortable chair.—Now, I am going to take you to see the marking out of the tennis-ground. Come along, and

leave that child to finish her letter,' she said, turning to her brother, who, with a resigned shrug of the shoulders, obeyed the summons.

Helen saw with relief that, for a wonder, Amelia was so busy with her preparations that she had overlooked the presence of the intrusive sunlight.





## CHAPTER XIII.

**T**HE lawn tennis-ground belonging to Maplewood Lodge had been taken off a field that lay higher up the hill than the house. Mr. Byers had railed the space in to keep the sheep off, and then rolled and drained it until, by degrees, it had become the best tennis-ground in the neighbourhood.

By four o'clock the sets were arranged, and the ball was flying wildly backwards and forwards over the net; while the men in white flannels, and the girls in brightly embroidered tennis-aprons, ran from side to side, catching it on their bats as it came.

Beneath a group of chestnut-trees at one

end, Helen was seated in a low basket-chair, under the shade of a red parasol; while not far off was Lady Perceval, with whom she was carrying on a desultory, low-voiced conversation.

The scene was full of light and colour, and keenly edged shade. The elm-trees on the other side stood up clear against the blue sky, while above the tennis-ground stretched a green breadth of hill. Down in the valley lay Stourton asleep under its smoky haze, through which the brass weathercock on the church steeple shone distinct and bright, caught by the level rays of the evening sun. The radiance of the day was gradually changing into another radiance, vaguer and more indefinite; while in the rustle overhead, you could hear as well as feel the coming coolness. .

‘Who is that playing in the striped cap?’ presently asked Lady Perceval, putting up her gold-rimmed eyeglass to watch the players.

Helen, seeing her companion’s thoughts

were for the moment completely absorbed, bent forward, and tried to satisfy her curiosity.

‘It is young Hopkins, I think.’

‘Yes ; he is playing with Margaret Corbett, and Maurice is playing with Miss Gibson. You have better eyes than I have, my child. Is it not so ?

‘Yes. How well Sir Maurice plays!’ the young woman added, as a brilliant back-hander at that moment made a score for his side.

‘I believe he does; but on the whole, I think tennis a stupid game.’

And the old lady, a little ashamed of her anxiety about the players and want of courtesy towards her companion, dropped her eyeglass and turned towards her.

‘I am afraid I do not know much about it.’

‘We must teach you all our rustic amusements, now that you have come amongst us at this time of the year. How long do you propose staying ?’

‘Mr. and Mrs. Eyre arrive, I believe, next week. There is only one spare bedroom and dressing-room at Maplewood ; I fear I shall have therefore to go.’

‘I am sure they would rather keep you, they are such kind hospitable people.’

As she spoke there was a sound of footsteps crunching on the gravel walk of the garden below, and Mr. and Mrs. Brotherton, their niece Miss Purvis, Mr. Ffrench, and Miss Amelia were seen coming through the small iron gate that led to the fields.

‘I am sure they would, but it is not possible,’ Helen went on.

‘You are looking as if you wanted country air. You had much more colour in your cheeks when you were down here before. How do you do, Mrs. Brotherton?’ and the courteous old lady rose with her ‘grande air’ to salute the new arrivals.

Mrs. Brotherton, panting and hot, seemed as much interested in the game as Lady Perceval. Miss Purvis, looking pretty and fresh in a white gown, devoted herself to



Mr. Ffrench, while Mr. Brotherton came and sat down beside Helen. He talked of the weather, of the prospects of the harvest, of the concert they were getting up for the organ in his church.

‘I hope you are going to sing, Countess de Ferrin.’

‘I am not a member of your Church, you know, Mr. Brotherton.’

‘No, but I am sure you will help us. I must speak to Lady Perceval ; she is prime mover in the affair.’

‘Please on’t say anything just now. I must go away next week. And besides, I am not allowed to sing. I came down here invalided, with no voice left.’

‘But you would be of such use in organizing things.’

‘I shall certainly be delighted to do anything I can, but I am afraid that is not much.’

Meantime Miss Byers, Mrs. Brotherton, and Lady Perceval were talking in suppressed undertones.

‘It’s all very well,’ said the clergyman’s wife, ‘but some day Mrs. Corbett will wake up to find the mischief done. You see, she has not come with her sister, and Mr. Gordon is stopping up there, I know.’

‘What a pity!’ sighed Lady Perceval. ‘I cannot see what charm there is about the man that they should have him at Deringham so continually.’

Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the afternoon meal, to which Miss Byers’s housewifely mind was immediately so exclusively devoted that she could talk or think of nothing else. Certainly the tea, in its shiny silver pot, the heaps of strawberries, the jug full of foaming cream, made a repast that was worthy of the trouble it had cost her and her aide-de-camp, Anne.

One by one, both lookers-on and players came strolling up, and there was soon a buzz of conversation going on round the table.

Helen could not help remarking how unfavourably young Lord Hopkins contrasted with Sir Maurice Perceval. They both

were in their flannels, and wore red and blue striped caps and waist-bands. At first she thought Sir Maurice had on gloves, his hands looked so brown against his white sleeves.

When tea was over, the enthusiasts again took up their bats and returned to finish the game, while the older ladies strolled away towards the house.

‘Won’t you join us, Miss Purvis?’ they heard Lord Hopkins ask the Brothertons’ niece.

‘I shall be delighted, if I am taking no one else’s place.’

‘I am going to look on, so you can have mine;’ and as Maurice spoke he offered her his bat.

‘Aren’t you going to play, then?’ inquired Margaret Corbett.

‘No, thank you; I am tired.’

‘We can get up another set if you like.’

‘Thank you; I think I have strained my wrist a little, and am afraid of making it worse.—What a fib!’ he continued, laughing,

as he threw himself down on the grass. 'The fact is, it looked so nice and cool here, and there was such a delicious scent of strawberries and chestnut blossoms, that I prefer it for a change to running about trying to catch Miss Gibson's balls, which never reach me. If she plays all her matches in the game of life as badly as she played that last with me, she will not have much success, poor thing.'

It certainly was pleasant under the chestnut trees that warm afternoon; the sun fell in a rose-coloured cloud through Helen's red parasol, lighting up the soft curls that encircled her head. There was a captivating sweetness in the air, an indescribable vague happiness round her. She thoroughly enjoyed the delicious languor, and the lazy indolence which she had not known since she had been away. A sudden attraction drew her towards the good-looking, soft-voiced personality beside her. And leaning back in her chair, she yielded both to exterior influences and the influences that were within herself,

prompting her to laugh and talk and perhaps sentimentalize. After all, had he not shown his preference for her society more than once, and had he not shown it now, by electing to remain beside her ?

‘I have not seen you since that day you came and had tea with me at the Tower.’

‘No ; what an age ago that seems !’

‘You have not been well since then ?’

‘How do you know ?’

‘I called and was not admitted, “because sir, the Countess ’as a ’eadache.”’

‘Did you ? I never heard of it.’

‘I was afraid you wouldn’t. As usual, I had forgotten my cards.’

‘I am so sorry !’

‘It doesn’t matter, as you see I was fated to meet you again.’

‘Yes, and under pleasanter circumstances,’ she said dreamily. And then, turning her eyes and looking at him fixedly, ‘Where is Mrs. Bellisle ?’

‘Laura ? She is stopping down at the

Duke of Berkeley's, a great admirer of pretty women !'

' Mr. Bellisle has a great deal of money, hasn't he?'

Maurice laughed.

' Yes. You seem to think he needs it. And a great mercy, too. Laura would have been miserable if she had not had thousands to spend.'

' I wish I had a few of her diamonds!'

' No, I am sure you don't. What would you do with them?'

' Pawn them.'

' They suit her.'

' Yes. She is beautiful!'

' We shall all be meeting in London again directly.'

' I suppose you will.'

' You are to be there too,' he said quickly.

' In London? Yes. But I am afraid my way hardly lies your way.'

' Why not?'

' Because, unfortunately, I am not in what you call "society."'

‘Neither am I. I detest it.’

Helen laughed sarcastically.

‘And Mrs. Bellisle?’

‘She loves it; but I never said our tastes were identical.’

As he spoke he drew a cigarette-case out of his pocket.

‘May I smoke? Do not hesitate to say No, if you object.’

‘I do not object, as it happens; but suppose I had, what would you have done?’

‘Bowed my head in resignation.’

‘Yes; and voted me a bore. You are, I should think, thoroughly spoilt.’

‘No more spoilt than my neighbours. I like all I can procure, and plenty of it.’

‘Even at the expense of what your neighbour wants?’

‘My neighbour ought not to want what I want. There is that curate, for instance, who is standing gaping at you. I know he desires ardently what I possess—the privilege of a few moments’ conversation; but I vow he shan’t get it; I am beginning

to cease to pity him for that business—you remember I told you—of the girl he had married to another fellow. Dear, dear! I almost think constancy does not exist in the world.'

And with a melancholy shake of the head, Sir Maurice lit his cigarette and began smoking.

'I wish you wouldn't,' Helen said, trying to look grave. 'I turned and caught his eye after you spoke. From the expression of his face, I am certain he guesses we are talking about him.'

'I know something else, and I will give you three guesses to find out what it is.'

'Do tell me.'

'I give you three guesses.'

'That Mrs. Brotherton will elope with the curate.'

'No. In fulness of time that may happen, but not just now.'

'That Miss Byers will marry you.'

'There you have come appallingly near the truth, but you don't think I would



joke on so serious a subject. Guess again.'

'That Margaret Corbett will marry Mr. Gibson.'

And as she spoke, she turned round and looked him in the face. He seemed conscious of her movement, and, with a certain daring, turned his eyes full on hers and quelled her in a moment.

'How completely at sea you are! Now I will tell you, though you don't deserve it. The curate will fall desperately in love with you. Do you mind? No, of course you don't. You have had such lots of it.'

'I have not had anything of the kind, and I wish you would not talk nonsense. Why don't you go and play tennis, Sir Maurice?'

'Because I don't care to be partner to a young lady who can't hit her balls.'

'How sarcastic you are!'

'Not at all. I have the deepest respect for your sex in some things. They beat us men hollow in unscrupulousness,

casuistry, and subtlety of invention—as match-makers, for instance. Good Lord! how can a poor fellow stand against them? My dear mother even, good and upright as she is, would accept any mean policy to attain her end in that department. It is quite terrific to see the abysses of baseness to which they will descend.'

Helen could not help laughing, but looked round quickly, fearing Lady Percival might be in their neighbourhood; and then glanced at the handsome face beside her to see if any intention were hidden beneath his words. He looked perfectly unconscious.

'You talk feelingly, as if you had suffered.'

'Not as yet—no, I cannot say I have. But whenever my mother takes it into her head that I ought to enter the bonds of matrimony, I know the only line open to me will be to fold my hands and say, "Now take me, marry me, buy the ring;" and all I stipulate is, have no orange-flowers or bridesmaids.'

At that moment voices were heard coming from behind the house in the direction of the garden.

‘Please take care,’ Helen whispered.

‘What is the matter? No, you don’t mean to say there is anything up? Hallo! there’s the curate and Mrs. Brotherton. I wish you joy. I shall bolt.’

And, getting up, he sauntered away towards the players.

‘Why is not Maurice playing?’ asked Lady Perceval anxiously.

‘I think he has strained his wrist slightly,’ said Helen, feeling guilty in spite of herself.





## CHAPTER XIV.

‘The man who seeks one thing in life, and but one,  
May hope to achieve it before life be done ;  
But he who seeks all things, wherever he goes,  
Only reaps from the hopes which around him he sows  
A harvest of barren regrets.’

**A** GENERAL when he lays siege to a town, digs trenches and throws up earthworks. A match-making woman, when she desires to conquer the obdurate heart of a possible *parti*, plans balls and concerts in town ; teas, rides, and picnics in the country. Of all these forms of amusement the latter is generally pronounced by the learned to be the most serviceable. What there should be in a very uncomfortable meal eaten in the open air to promote matrimony, the uninitiated might hardly understand ; but as

the custom has been sanctified by tradition and handed down to us from time immemorial, we conclude it has been found efficacious, and so our contemporaries persevere in the practice.

Anne, the Byers' old housekeeper, was very frank upon the subject.

'Why the quality wants to be bothering lookin' at old tumbledown places; takin' their dinners on the damp ground, and carryin' away all the knives and forks and plates, to bring back nothin' but earwigs, is more than I can understan'.'

But then Anne was no philosopher, and was not acquainted with 'all the antecedents and laws that rule the movements of her betters, and could not therefore be expected to predict the whole of their immediate results.'

Young Lord Hopkins and Sir Maurice Perceval were the two eligible Stourton men. Mr. Gordon and Dr. Clark did not apparently count; and the curate, of course, was outside the pale; Mrs. Brotherton had set her heart on her pretty niece, Maud

Purvis, marrying the one, while the whole neighbourhood, Lady Perceval and Miss Byers first and foremost, had set their hearts on Margaret Corbett marrying the other.

Young Hopkins was a willing victim, and almost from the first laid down his arms, and submitted to be plucked, trussed, and popped into Mrs. Brotherton's matrimonial pie, as if he were a pigeon, who, having fluttered too young out of the parental dovecote, falls into the first skilfully laid trap.

Sir Maurice, however, completely out-mancœuvred the host arrayed against him, treating them all the time with a tender forbearance that was quite irresistible.

Helen generally shirked the diurnal expeditions, pleading her delicate health as an excuse. She delighted in nature, in green fields and rustling woods ; but did not care to look upon them with an accompaniment of sandwiches and lobster-salads and Mrs. Brotherton's gossiping tongue. Her wardrobe, also, was limited,

and the vicarious benevolence of aiding two young people to make love to one another amidst damp and sylvan scenes was a greater call on its capacities than she could meet; one showery day having got wet through and spoilt her best dress, she struggled no more in the cause of philanthropy. Amelia's constancy and loyalty filled her with the most intense admiration; the same bravery devoted to a greater cause would have produced world-famous deeds.

The young woman secretly began to marvel how in a very few days one of the heroes of these festivities grew weary of them. Sir Maurice was only just back on leave from London, and would have liked, one would have thought, the 'verdant shades' and 'woody dells' as a change; but whether he thought 'mischief lurked amongst them,' or whether he imagined 'discretion to be the better part of valour,' the fact remains that he shamelessly and cruelly vitiated all plans made on his behalf by coolly declining to go on any expedition, and walking over

every day instead to have a chat or play a game of chess at Maplewood Lodge, with Mr. Byers, who, with that easy tolerance said to be characteristic of the shoulder-shrugging portion of the community, pretended not to be aware of the machinations that were going on around him, and never thought of interfering with one side or the other.

Secretly, if we must confess it, Helen was pleased to see the devices of the majority thus frustrated. Margaret Corbett had always struck her as being one of those people who perform the office of cotton-wool in the economy of the world—filling up the interstices and cavities, without any distinct function of their own. She might do very well as wife to a man who simply required negative virtues and nothing more of the partner of his bosom ; but here was a prince compared to other human beings, of noble proportions and responsive intelligence. Was he to have his senses dulled for the rest of his life by communion with this harmless but unresponsive machine, and his utterance



choked by the soft but all-pervading inanity of this narrow, trifling nature? Every day she saw Sir Maurice she became more confirmed in her opinion of the unfitness of Margaret Corbett to appreciate him, or to become the sharer of his life. A dangerous attitude of mind, you will say, for any woman to occupy towards a member of the other sex.

She sat work in hand, and listened while Sir Maurice and Mr. Byers discussed every subject, social and literary; generally, however, wandering back to politics. It is curious, Helen thought, how men argue in a circle, much more than women, who are too much inclined to dash from subject to subject. The masculine mind will go over the same beaten track, meeting the same argumentative obstructions, tumbling into the same fallacious puddles a hundred times over.

Once Sir Maurice had stated that he believed social inequality to be the mainspring of civilization, and once his opponent had stated that he believed in socialism and

equality as his dream for the happiness of the world, the listener imagined that they would have been content to accept one another's mutual opinions and remain quiescent; but the young woman found it far otherwise. Indeed, she would sometimes leave them and go out for a walk while they were arguing, and return to find them at the same place, almost repeating the same words, as when she left. Sometimes their discussions began in the drawing-room, but soon Mr. Byers, impelled by the need for his beloved pipe, adjourned to the smoking-room. Helen was always invited in too, if she were at home; but afraid of offending Miss Byers's susceptibilities, accepted but seldom.

One day, when returning from her solitary walk, she met Sir Maurice descending the steps that led from Maplewood Lodge to the road.

'Are you coming in already, Countess de Ferrin?'

'Yes.'

'Where have you been?'

‘Not a very interesting walk. Down the hill and round by the valley.’

‘Is that where you gathered these?’ he asked, touching a bunch of wild thyme and honeysuckle she held in her hand.

‘Yes; I was gathering them while you and Mr. Byers were going over the same old ground. Do you know,’ she said saucily, ‘you and he remind me of the horses I used to see at Villarette, going round and round in a circle, grinding the corn.’

‘I wish we did grind any corn. I am afraid there is little but husk. I had no idea, however, we had so severe a critic as audience.’

Maurice laughed; but there was a certain reserve of annoyance in his heart. He had imagined, at various times, he was impressing a sense of his superiority on his fair neighbour. It was rather hard now to discover she had been secretly making fun of him.

‘I don’t know if I am severe, but I must tell you, in confidence, I dislike arguing so

much. It seems to me an unsatisfactory way of spending sunny afternoons. To begin, as I see you, with a discussion, and end with a game of chess, is only a continuation of the mental struggle and an endeavour to get the better of your opponent.'

'What would you have us do?'

'I would have you go out with all the young people—Miss Byers and Co.'

'Really? Not if I know it! Let us change the subject. Will you give me a bit of that thyme, Countess de Ferrin?'

'Certainly,' and she held out her bunch of flowers.

They were both silent for a moment, while he chose a sprig, put it in his button-hole, and then leant back against the gate as though he were afraid of her passing through. It was getting late; the evening sky was shining in crimson bars through the elm-trees; the peasants were sauntering past, going home from their work in white jackets stained with the earth they had been tilling. All the busy sounds of day were hushed; the silence was only broken by the bleating

of a sheep in the field above, and the light rustle of the breeze that stirred Helen's soft curls, and caressed her cheek, warm with exercise.

'How peaceful it is this evening!' she murmured at last, with a sigh. 'I always think the view from here so pretty.'

'Yes, this is very pretty; but the most picturesque scenery in the county lies some little distance away—too far to walk,' he answered.

'I dare say—and driving in the Byers' landau is so very slow.'

He smiled.

'I wonder if I made a proposition would you accept?'

'Now?'

'Yes, immediately.'

'Before I know what it is?'

'Before you know what it is. You rely so much on faith, that I shall ask you to exercise a little of the quality of which you seem to have such an abundance.'

'I never said my "faith" extended as far as you. But what is it?'

‘ I will call for you in the pony-carriage at three to-morrow afternoon, and take you a drive. My mother has a meeting in the town about the concert they are getting up for the organ in the church, or a new weathercock on the steeple, or something that wants renovating, so she will not require my services. Will you come?’

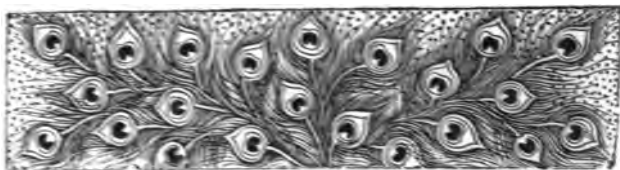
‘ What, in the little pony-cart with the rearing chestnut?’

‘ Yes; it’s like its master, as quiet as a lamb if it gets its own way.’

‘ And Miss Byers?’

‘ Bother Miss Byers! Please trust me and the chestnut this once,’ he begged pleadingly.

‘ Ah! there is Mr. Jones,’ she said, as the curate’s figure appeared on the road. ‘ Good-night. Yes, I will go.’ Giving him her hand, she ran quickly up the steps.



## CHAPTER XV.

‘C’était le printemps ; l’air était doux, le soleil radieux et chaud ; des arbres, des arbustes, des plantes, il se dégageait une senteur enivrante qui semblait griser les oiseaux eux-mêmes.’

**R**EADER, have you ever travelled in Germany in the summer? and have you ever partaken of a beverage called ‘Maitrank’? It is composed of Rhine wine—‘tasting of Flora and the country green’—strawberries, cherries, ice, and sweet-scented herbs.

For a short time after you have drunk it, everything looks smiling round you; imagination takes to itself wings; you think the German Fraus good-looking, and the landscape imposing; the world is an enchanted land bathed in golden mist.

On a sunny spring day there is an intoxication of fresh air, blue sky, and rustling breezes—*une griserie de la belle air*—which has the same effect on the senses as ‘Maitrank.’ And Helen partook of it as she drove along in the little car beside Maurice. She felt happy, simply in the sensation of living, breathing in the warm scented air, and looking on the sunlit fields. Her pale face lit up, and her eyes shone with a glow of dreamy pleasure. He turned once, looked at her, and smiled; he was happy in the sensation of giving happiness.

There was a certain lawlessness in the expedition that made it still more delightful. They had braved Miss Byers’s frigid remarks, and had driven down the High Street, past Mrs. Brotherton’s and the curate’s; and now they were out on the high-road, beyond Dr. Clark’s Roman fortification and the entrance to Stourton Court.

‘I want to take you,’ he said, pulling up the carriage-rug, and putting it over



her with one hand, while with the other he held the reins, 'to Davenport Castle; it is our show-place about here. There are woods there worthy of Dante's terrestrial paradise. They will be in full beauty just now.'

'Very well,' she said, glad of the strength outside herself that led her where it would, and on which she depended with all the charm of novelty.

'The Earl of Davenport, owner of the place, represents the *crème de la crème* of our social dairy, as I dare say you know.'

'I can't say I did.'

'Do you mean to say that Miss Byers has left you in such a state of ignorance? I should not have expected it of her. I can give you another piece of information also, which I am sure you have not heard before, for I have it first-hand—Maud Purvis is engaged to his son.'

'You don't say so! Mrs. Brother-ton's machinations have been successful, hen!'

‘Yes, Mrs. Brotherton’s machinations have been successful; but there is a devil of a row over it. I should send him away to London if I were his father. New-mown hay, honeysuckle, nightingales—all this sort of thing,’ waving his whip round him as he spoke, ‘confirms a man in the sweet madness. Send him away to London, and ten to one the smoke, and bustle, and ugliness will have cured him in a fortnight.’

‘Really?’ she answered, accepting the dictum that was enunciated with such an air of conviction.

‘He is not a bad fellow, Hopkins,’ he went on. ‘Only, being in love is a terrible drawback to a man.’

‘Is it?’

‘Yes; of course it is. You must know all about that.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you have had hosts of fellows in love with you.’

‘You have informed me of that fact before, and I then endeavoured to convince you it was not so.’

‘Tell me,’ he went on, as if he had not heard what she said. ‘You will not be angry, will you? I wan’t to know. Did you love your husband? I give you full permission to snub me well if I am indiscreet.’

‘Of course I did! Why do you ask?’

‘Because I heard he was so much older than you.’

‘What has that to do with it? I don’t think a man is worth speaking to until he is over sixty.’

‘Ah! *Merci!*’

And, with a mock bow, he took off his hat.

She was silent, with an emphasis; and turning away, fixed her eyes steadily on a pine-tree that stood out green and glossy against the sunlit mist lying on the hill behind.

‘What did you do at the old château where you lived?’

‘What did I do?’ she said, astonished at this question. ‘I was very happy. I read the “Lives of the Saints.” We went pilgrimages,

my mother and I—amongst others, to the shrine of the holy St. Helena, whom I am called after. There was, curiously enough, one close to Villarette. The picture over the altar worked miracles; I saw it cure a blind child.'

'Umph! You believe in miracles, then?'

'Of course I do.'

'Did your husband allow you to confess?'

'I never asked him. It's a rule of our Church. I could not get on without confession: it is such a comfort to say, "I am to blame."'

He turned and looked steadily at the rose-flushed face beside him.

'I should not have thought that was your line of country; but one cannot be expected to know all one's neighbour's ideas at once.' Then, harking back to what she had said before, he asked, 'Were you called after St. Helena?'

'I believe so.'

'Do you know the meaning of the name Helen?'

‘It means “Light,” does it not?’

‘Yes. Don’t you know Goethe’s lines in “Faust,” when Lynkeus, the warder, looking out for Helen, says :

“Zog den Blick nach jener Seite,  
Statt der Schluchten, statt der Höhn,  
Statt der Erd und Himmelsweite,  
Sie, die Einzige, zu Spähn.”’

‘I don’t understand German.’

‘And you are astonished that I do. I know your opinion of guardsmen, Countess de Ferrin. I have already heard it.’

‘Not at all,’ she said inconsequently. ‘I was only thinking how ignorant I was.’

‘The subject of “Helen” has been well treated by English poets. Do you know Morris’s “Death of Paris”? Elaine is the same name as Helen. You have read the “Idylls of the King”?’

‘No. I have only read one thing of Tennyson’s—“The Princess.” It bored me.’

She said this more from contrariety than from conviction, but was soon quelled.

‘ You cannot have read it carefully, then. But have you no other name?’

‘ Yes—Hélène Marguerite. Those are my two names.’

‘ I like Marguerite best. I don’t know why, but it always seems to me that Helen is for Sunday use; Marguerite for week-days. By-the-bye, it is the same as Miss Corbett’s. Then there are many pretty changes of Marguerite—Rita, Daisy. One might fall in love with a Daisy, but never with a Greek-draped Helen.’

She was obliged to look up and laugh as he played with her name. He pushed back his hat and stretched himself out, while he lightly flicked his whip about the pony’s ears. Then, with a sigh of relief, said :

‘ What a mercy! we shall have no more picnics!’

‘ Why?’

‘ Because that foolish fish, Hopkins, is landed.’

‘ Oh!’ was all her answer; but in the aspiration of that final ‘h’ there was more than he understood.

‘I have come to the conclusion,’ he went on, ‘that it is very seldom one meets a woman worth talking to. They are afflicted in general with what Frenchmen call a *banalité désolante*. If a woman is intelligent, however, I think, on the whole, she is better company than a man.’

Helen remembered with an involuntary smile the dulness of the Byers-Perceval arguments, and said innocently :

‘Do you think so?’

‘Yes, I think I do. But then social intercourse is so ridiculously constituted. Directly one begins to get on with a woman, *she* goes, or *you* go, or people talk, or some humbug of that sort. But now, Countess de Ferrin, here we are in the Davenport pine-woods.’

The pony’s trot sounded sharp on the carpet of pine-needles as they passed quickly along under the deep, cool shadow, illumined here and there by a golden shaft of sunlight that fell athwart the roadway.

‘This is our canal,’ he said, as they

drove down an incline out of the pine-wood towards a bridge that crossed the wide, eddying, silver band. 'It runs right across the Davenport property.' He stopped the pony as he spoke. 'Isn't it pretty here?'

He turned to his companion, who had been silent for some time.

Helen was not looking particularly beautiful at that moment. The evening sun brought out the prominent chin and slightly hollowed cheek, which were perhaps the only faults in her face; but it was the passion and pathos there revealed in every line that attracted Maurice's attention. Some people absolutely forget themselves in the face of nature. The scene they looked on, though not wondrous in any way, was as fair as well could be conceived, both in itself and its associations.

The pony-carriage had stopped on the edge of the pine-wood, and its shadow made the scene before them brighter and lovelier by the contrast. Beyond the canal stretched a sweep of fields and upland, backed by a



fringe of trees. The limpid sky was melted to pure gold in the crucible of the evening sun, while a pale new moon stood above in the heavens. The ceaseless splash of the water running over the lock a little way above was borne in waves of sound on the evening breeze, that rustled through the sword-like leaves of the water iris and sedges; the sleepy cawing of the rooks close by, and the voices of the children that came from a red-roofed cottage on the other side of the canal, completed the symphony of pastoral sounds. Appreciative silence is the truest companionship.

Maurice and Helen gained a better comprehension of one another in the pause they made under the shadow of the pine-wood that May afternoon, than they could in weeks of intercourse amidst the stir and bustle of the world.

Presently she roused herself from her reverie.

‘It is getting late. We must turn towards home.’

‘I fear we must.’

‘Let us drive over the bridge, then. It would not be lucky to go home without doing that.’

‘I suppose not,’ he answered with a smile, gathering his reins together.

‘What a pretty picture!’ she said in a low voice, as they passed the cottage on the other side of the bridge, outside which a man and woman were standing—he in his working clothes, with the contented look of a worker resting from labour.

‘I wonder if people in that class are happy?’

‘No. Imagine living in that cottage—with such a creature, too!’

Helen glanced from the untidy, red-faced woman, who stood, her arms akimbo, to her aristocratic-looking neighbour, and could not resist a smile.

‘Ah,’ he went on, ‘poverty is such an ugly thing! It is so difficult to be virtuous on a pound a week; whereas, as Becky Sharp said, it is so easy to be virtuous on ten thousand a year.’

His face grew hard as he spoke, like his mother's. Helen shivered.

'There ! you are cold, Countess de Ferrin. That blessed rug is down again. Shall I get out and put it up?'

'No, no, thank you ! I was only thinking again that it was time to go home.'

'And that made you shiver ? I believe you are afraid of Miss Byers !'

'I dare say I am, a little.'

'I can tell you,' he added, passing over the reins, in spite of Helen's prohibition, and getting out to arrange the rug, 'since I began coming to Maplewood Lodge I watch her movements with the greatest attention. She makes me very nervous.'

'I can see that.'

'Never mind. As a child, I was always told that the month of May was the month you might do what you liked in, and Choose-day the day on which you might do what you "chose" ! By this drive, therefore, I am only carrying out a tradition of my youth.'

Helen said nothing. A shadow had

fallen on her heart. Presently, leaning back, he began to hum the words of a French romance of Alfred de Musset's:

‘Prenez y garde marquise,  
Cet amour là quoi qu'on en dise.’

For a minute or two the low rich voice went on, hesitating now and then to find a forgotten word. At last he stopped and said; ‘How silent you are again, Countess de Ferrin.’

‘Silence is a virtue which renders us agreeable to our fellow-creatures.’

‘That is sententious, but hardly true in your case, for your voice is one of your most charming qualities. Sing something, will you?’

‘No, I prefer listening. I never knew you were musical.’

‘Didn't you? I have been told that if I had cultivated my voice, I might have had rather a nice tenor. Fancy, what an opportunity lost!’

‘Why?’

‘Because all you ladies fall in love with a fellow who has a voice.’

‘What an advantage! but please sing something more.’

‘Do you really wish it?’

‘Please.’

‘Well, now, what shall it be?’

‘The same you were trying just now.’

‘I have forgotten the words.’

‘I will prompt you as you go along.’

He then began again louder :

“ Prenez y garde marquise,  
Cet amour là quoi qu’on en dise,  
Se retrouvera quelque jour.  
Quand un cœur vous a contenue,  
Juana, la place est devenue,  
Trop vaste pour un autre amour.”

Now then, I forget how it goes on,’ he said, stopping.

“ Le temps emporte sur son aile  
Et le printemps et l’hirondelle,”

the young woman murmured beside him; after that she prompted him to the end.

“ Et la vie et les jours perdu,  
Tout s’en va comme la fumée,  
L’espérance, et la renommée,  
Et moi qui vous ai tant aimée,  
Et toi qui ne t’en souviens plus.”

The last line fell like a faint echo on the silence around them, and Helen had a sudden presentiment that on her death-bed the memory of his voice, and the dusky evening, and the silver moon, would come back to her.

‘Why, there are the lights of Stourton,’ he said, pointing towards a faint glimmer in the distance. ‘Our “maying” has come to an end. I only hope, Countess de Ferrin, you will be induced to trust yourself to me again.’

‘Alas! I shall not have an opportunity; I am going away on Monday.’

‘On Monday? Why?’

‘To make room for the Eyres.’

‘Confound the Eyres!’

After this frank expression of his sentiments, nothing more was said. Sir Maurice seemed to be occupied with his own thoughts, and Helen did not care to talk.

All that evening Miss Byers made her guest feel that there was a certain amount of moral obliquity attaching to her behaviour.

At dinner, Mr. Byers re-echoed Maurice's words :

‘Are you going on Monday?’

‘I must.’

‘Bother those Eyres!’

‘How changeable you are, John! A little time ago you admired Mrs. Eyre.’

‘I dare say I did, but she has become too spiritualistic; Countess Helen is more material.’

Helen laughed.

‘Thank you for the compliment. I am afraid though, as Amelia says, you are very changeable. I don't think I ought to be subjected to your fascinations any longer.’

After the young woman had retired for the evening, Miss Byers turned to her brother and said severely :

‘I wish, John, you would not make those observations about the Eyres. It is much more advisable Countess de Ferrin should return to London.’

A smile irradiated the old gentleman's face, and his eyes twinkled with amusement as he took his candle to retire also.

‘My dear Amelia, I am afraid you and I, manœuvre and scheme as we may, will not prevent the old-world offence that has ever been in fashion.’

‘I hate philandering.’

‘Do you know the derivation of the word, my dear? It comes from the Greek, and signifies *philo*, to love, and *andros*, a man. I am too old to be scandalized by the flirtations of a pretty woman and a good-looking young fellow like Maurice Perceval. Consciousness of my own infirmities has ever made me very tolerant for those of others; and after all, taken in the abstract, flirting is not a very heinous offence.’

The old gentleman, chuckling to himself as he spoke, walked away.

‘Well, remember, John, if anything goes wrong I think you are greatly to blame,’ was Miss Byers’s parting shot.





## CHAPTER XVI.

' Derrière chez mon père  
Il est un bois taillis :  
Le rossignol y chante  
Et le jour et la nuit.  
Il chante pour les filles  
Qui n'ont pas d'ami ;  
Il ne chant pas pour moi.  
J'en ai un Dieu merci.'

**I**T is a physical as well as a mental law, that if the eyes or brain are concentrated upon one idea, everything outside or beyond it vanishes from sight. Under certain circumstances, contingencies and probabilities, patent to lookers-on, are invisible to those most interested in the course of events.

Lady Perceval had set her heart on Maurice's marrying Margaret Corbett, and

refused to see any other possibility. When her son, therefore, at dinner the evening after he had driven Helen to Davenport Castle, suggested to his mother that they might ask the young Frenchwoman to come over on Monday, and stop at Stourton for the concert, she immediately not only gave her consent, but began to meditate on the advantage her company would be in many ways. She would act as a foil to Maurice and Margaret; she would sing at the concert; she would keep her (Lady Perceval) company, while the two young people were spending all those hours together for which she intended to legislate without further loss of time.

Sir Maurice was delighted to see that his mother entered into his views with such readiness—although, indeed, had she made an objection, he would have dealt with it in his own royal way, for he had quite made up his mind that his leave was to be spent as much as possible to his own satisfaction; and Countess de Ferrin, under his own roof, had now become one

of the necessary ingredients of that satisfaction.

Mr. Ferrers, therefore, when he came down to Maplewood on Saturday, intending to take Helen back with him on Monday, found an unexpected change of arrangements; and had to return by himself, taking a shawl for Madame de Carrel, which Helen had knitted in her absence, and some flowers and fruit from the Maplewood garden, as a peace-offering.

Miss Byers was politely distant in her manner towards Helen, addressing her when called upon to do so, but purposely putting her out into the cold in conversation when she dared.

Like most emotional natures, our heroine had the pride of Lucifer, and met Amelia's rebuffs with light-hearted laughing defiance—an attitude she found it easy enough to assume, supported as she was by her uncle and Mr. Byers, who addressed most of their conversation to her.

Brave as she was, however, Helen felt relieved that Amelia let her go alone in

the carriage to Stourton on Monday. She arrived at about six o'clock in the afternoon, and found Lady Perceval, as on the first visit she paid in the winter, sitting in the south drawing-room. The casement window was open, and scented breezes blew in from the garden. The *portières* and curtains were put back, and there was no fire burning in the grate. Summer had penetrated into the old house, and to Helen the air seemed vibrating with colour and perfume. Her heart beat with pleasure when she felt the warm kiss of welcome that Lady Perceval gave her.

A little before six, Sir Maurice came in, and after a desultory talk in the gloaming, Lady Perceval offered to show Helen the way to her room.

‘ You will lose yourself if you attempt to go about the passages by yourself. The house is built round a courtyard, and you know how puzzling that is. You will never find out which side of the square you are on. See here,’ and as they went up the stairs, the old lady opened one of the

diamond-paned windows, with the coloured crest in the centre, and let Helen see the grass-grown courtyard.

The young woman's room lay on the garden side, under the shadow of the ilex-tree, and close to the chapel tower, from which the clock chimed out every hour to the whole neighbourhood.

Before unpacking her trunk and laying her things out for dinner, she walked to the window, but jumped back again nervously as she heard the passage-door beneath open, and saw Sir Maurice and his dog go out. She remained some time debating which dress she should put on, and at last decided on the white muslin that was laid, as the most easily tossed, with its delicate lace frillings, on the top of the trunk. She then took out her daintiest pair of embroidered shoes, that were laid in tissue-paper beside it.

Hot and red in the face from these exertions, she heard a knock at the door; and on going to open it, found the white-capped maid-servant waiting outside with

two velvet-leaved scarlet roses and some maidenhair fern in her hand.

‘Sir Maurice has sent them with his compliments,’ was the message given.

Helen put one in her hair, and one in the front of her dress. When she entered the drawing-room before dinner, she found Sir Maurice sitting there alone.

‘I am glad you appreciated my offering,’ he said, looking at the flowers.

‘Yes; thank you very much. They are lovely.’

‘I am decorated too, you see.’

And as he spoke, he lifted the lapel of his coat, and showed her a white star-like *marguerite*.

She looked as if she did not understand, and then flushed scarlet to the roots of her hair. For a moment her heart misgave her, and then, as she turned to the window and looked out at the yellow sunset sky, a flash of her natural, ardent love of life and happiness came over her.

‘Why should not I be happy like other women? And, after all, he is a great deal

too fastidious—too fine a gentleman for there to be any danger of either of us falling in love. That would never do.'

'How silent you two are! I hope you have not been fighting,' Lady Perceval remarked, as she entered.

'I will be happy—I will be happy! It is only for a few days longer,' Helen whispered to the accompaniment of her footsteps as she walked in to dinner across the carpetless hall, her pulses fluttering, her nerves in a quiver.

Ah! my heroine, don't you remember the old French nursery rhyme you learnt in your childhood, telling how Giroflé and Girofla wandered into the forbidden wood, and meet the King, the Queen, the 'Devil,' and 'Love'?

Next day there was a rehearsal for the concert. Lady Perceval seemed to think it necessary to give extra help to the Protestant place of worship, because of the Roman Catholic chapel at Stourton, which was one of the family traditions that must

not be interfered with. She even made rather a point of Mr. O'Callaghan countenancing the proceedings by joining in the chorus. The good liberal-minded man was delighted to do so, hoping in his heart that the organ might somewhat improve the service in Mr. Brotherton's church.

The rain descended in torrents; the wind howled round the old house, making every weathercock creak and every window rattle. Lady Perceval did not come down, so Helen and Maurice had breakfast by themselves in the great gloomy dining-room, the fireplace of which alone would have sufficed as living-room for an ordinary family. By drawing the screen across, however, and having the meal laid on a small table in the embrasure of one of the windows, they managed to be tolerably cheerful. They then wandered about, tapping the glass, looking out of the window, and yawning, not knowing what to do, until Maurice suggested a game of chess, at which he beat Helen hollow.

At three, the two Miss Corbetts arrived ;



and a little after, the rest of the performing company.

The cottage piano had been drawn out of the south drawing-room, and placed in front of the brown and gold leather screen, with its cupids and birds, that had been brought from Italy by the wicked old Perceval, lover of the Italian marchesa. Margaret Corbett made a pretty picture against it, singing 'Auld Robin Gray' with her fresh young voice, that lingered amid the arches of the ceiling of the old hall.

Later, the afternoon being still wet and stormy, they chose as a cheering occupation the study of a glee, in which everyone was perfectly unfettered by his neighbour, and sang on his or her own account. Mr. Brotherton in vain endeavoured every now and then to give the key-note. On they went, regardless of time and tune. Helen at last could stand it no longer, and went into the dining-room, preferring the noise of the dripping shower to the dissonance within doors. Suddenly she heard the door in the corner of the room, that led

to the offices and stables, open, and Maurice came in with his Newfoundland.

‘Ah! you here!’ he said, when he saw Helen. ‘I thought it would soon be too much for you. I bolted long ago.’

He laughed, and, taking his handkerchief, wiped the rain off his sleeves.

‘Take care ; some of them might hear you.’

Putting her finger to her lips, she walked to the farthest window. He waited a moment or two by the fire, and then sauntered over to where she stood. For some time he remained beside her without saying anything, his head resting on his arm, that was leaning on the window-sash. He felt as if there were no need to speak; she understood him, he understood her. They were there side by side looking at the tracery of dark branches waving about wildly in the wind, and at the stormy sky; and might have been alone in the world for aught they thought or cared about anyone else. He watched her, taking in

every detail of the grey, softly-falling dress, that clung so closely and easily to the swelling bust and slender waist, seeing the graceful head with its soft curls, and the violet eyes with their drooping lashes.

Complete as the fruition of love is, those first foreshadowings which cast themselves on our hearts are almost sweeter—those premonitory symptoms which creep in and invade our souls before a breath has yet passed in the air to tell us it is there.

‘For they are all,  
Both great and small,’

came with a rush through the door leading to the hall, which at that moment was opened by Mr. Ffrench.

‘Damn that fellow Ffrench!’ Helen distinctly heard, as, with a smile, she left the window to see what he wanted.

‘I thought perhaps you would take a soprano part. We want somebody so much to lift them up.’

Poor Mr. Ffrench, very red in the face,

made a pantomime relative to his Herculean efforts 'to lift them up.'

'I am afraid,' Helen was beginning, in the tone of voice of the man in the parable who had a wife to marry, 'that—— Why, there is Miss Byers, I declare! I beg your pardon, Mr. French.'

And she flew out of the room to propitiate her old friend, whom she had not seen since leaving Maplewood.

Amelia had brought the Eyres with her, and immediately began, while Helen helped her off with her wraps, a catalogue of their qualities and capacities.

'I thought they might be useful,' talking of her guests as if they had been tables or chairs, or some other necessary article in domestic economy. 'She sings so well, and he plays the violin—indeed, is clever in many ways; has gone a little astray on spiritualism, but one must expect some oddity in so clever a person. Quite a gentleman, too. His father was Eyre of Eyretown, you know; they have come down in the world through reverses.'

As she spoke the last words, Miss Byers breathlessly emerged from her last wrap, and was able to give Helen a let 'bygones be bygones' embrace.

'Why haven't you been down to see us, child—quite forgotten your old friends, I suppose?'

Helen smiled. She was as anxious as Miss Byers to ignore past misunderstandings. The old lady's suspicions on the subject of her *protégée* had been lulled to rest, since she had been made aware of Margaret Corbett's repeated visits to the Court, and Sir Maurice's rather increased attentions towards her.

No sail appearing to shipwrecked mariners was ever greeted with more enthusiasm than the new arrivals were greeted by the assembled company, and Mrs. Eyre was immediately pressed by Mr. Ffrench into the service of the sopranos. Helen sat down to chat with Amelia.

'For they are all.'

'No, they're not,' faintly shrieked Mr. Ffrench, who, with a stick in his hand,

was making gestures like a cock flapping its wings. 'I beg your pardon for contradicting, but you are not in time.'

Which formidable statement was received with a giggle all round, as if it were a good joke. When they had recovered their solemnity the key-note was given by Mr. Brotherton, and away they all went again.

In the embrasure of one of the windows, Mrs. Brotherton had got hold of Sir Maurice.

'Very energetic, conscientious man, Mr. Ffrench—such a comfort to Mr. Brotherton ; but I am afraid he is straying.'

'So sorry !' Maurice answered abruptly. 'Who with? A girl?'

No ; I wish it were. Don't you know, Sir Maurice? You must have seen—you must have heard?'

'Heard what? Has it come to that?'

'Why, yes, of course ; he is madly in love with the young French widow, and I know he thinks his affection is returned. I need not tell you, if that is so, there is no

choice open to Mr. B. He must part with him.'

'What are you going to contribute to the amusement of the public, Countess de Ferrin?' asked Mr. Brotherton, in his gentle voice.

'I am afraid I cannot do anything,' she said, putting her hand to her throat. 'My voice is still so weak.'

'Couldn't you read us something? You read so beautifully. Or perhaps you and Mr. Ffrench could recite a piece together. He has already promised to give us "The Bells."'

'I did not know you were so accomplished, Mr. Ffrench.'

Mr. Ffrench flushed scarlet to the very tips of his ears as Helen addressed him.

What woman — aye, even amongst the best of them — will not exercise a few of her charms on an undefended victim? As the light fell from the painted window and shone into the depths of Helen's grey eyes, there was an interest which one observer at least objected to.

When she turned away, she heard Mrs. Brotherton's voice asking in her sweetest tones :

‘ Why don't you and Mr. French do the Balcony Scene from “ Romeo and Juliet ” ? He acts Romeo so well, and you would certainly make an ideal Juliet.’

‘ I am afraid it would be beyond my powers.’

Helen hailed with delight at that moment the approach of Sir Maurice Perceval, who had been standing in the background, looking solemn and severe.

‘ We are not going to let you off, Countess de Ferrin. You must give us something also. My mother says so.’

‘ But Lady Perceval knows I cannot, Sir Maurice.’

‘ Well, you must come and make your own excuses. Couldn't you sing “ Vive la Chanson ” ? It does not strain your voice much,’ he said pleadingly, as they walked away together.

Mrs. Brotherton turned to Miss Byers.

‘ I do trust she won't be so foolish as to



sing one of her dreadful French songs. It would never do.'

'Why not?' asked Miss Byers, who, although willing to frown on Helen herself, would not allow anyone else to do so.

'Because the tendency of the people is immoral, and their literature and art are both tainted with the same stain.'

After which sweeping assertion, made with the most complete ignorance of the language or literature of which she spoke, Mrs. Brotherton relapsed into a deprecatory silence.

When the party separated after the practising was over, Margaret Corbett alone remained behind. Mrs. Corbett and Florence were engaged to dine at the Gibsons'. Lady Perceval therefore suggested that, instead of returning alone to Deringham, she had better stop with them.

Lady Perceval, Maurice, Helen, and Margaret dined together. When the meal was ended, the ladies adjourned to the south drawing-room, leaving Sir Maurice to smoke by

himself. After a little time Lady Perceval began to nod by her lamp, where she was pretending to read. Margaret Corbett, rising, went softly to the window and peeped out.

‘It is beautiful—quite cleared up,’ she whispered. ‘How the nightingales must be singing in the chestnut avenue! They always do after rain. Shall we go out?’

Helen assented readily.

‘Mind you don’t catch cold, my dears,’ said the old lady, whom they had imagined asleep. ‘Put on strong boots, and something over your heads.’

They were soon out under the great ilex-tree, on their way to the chestnut avenue. The night was soft, the air transparent and luminous. A nightingale, awakened by the moon, which bathed the great trees of the park in waves of light, was singing its love to the stars. A gentle breeze, laden with the scent of flowers, stirred the leaves of the trees. All was hushed, tranquil, dreamy. The noise and weariness of life seemed laid aside and forgotten, as things belonging to

another existence. The girls talked low, awed and silenced by the stillness. Presently the sound of a footstep on the gravel walk, and the red tip of a cigar in the dark, showed that they were not alone; and Maurice Perceval, turning in his walk, joined them. Helen thought she felt the young girl's arm that rested on hers tremble. On they silently went, past the white gate that Maurice opened for them, until they stood under the shade of the great chestnut-trees. The birds' full, mellow notes fell upon the stillness of the night, first in one tree, and then in another, answering backwards and forwards, joining and interlacing their song. The listeners stood scarcely breathing, drinking in the melody as it rippled forth.

‘And then you say that life can give us no thorough enjoyment,’ said Helen presently, in a low voice.

‘Who said so?’ responded Maurice. ‘I wish you would not draw conclusions from premises that were never stated.’

‘People in general say so.’

‘Perhaps those do who don’t know what joy, or love, or life means. I have never understood,’ he went on, as though following out the train of thought she had disturbed, ‘why the nightingale’s note should be called sad. When I have been most sorrowful myself, it has been to me the soul of rapture.’

‘Surely in its very ecstasy there is something akin to pain ; therein lies our highest pleasures,’ she answered.

Silence fell on the group for a few seconds.

‘There, that’s Romeo,’ broke in Margaret Corbett, who was not listening to what they said. ‘You will hear Juliet answer in a moment. It reminds me of the Balcony Scene—you and Mr. Ffrench, Helen.’

‘Don’t, Margaret! I hoped no one had heard.’

‘I can comfort you, then, by telling you I heard every word.’

‘What do you mean by Mr. Ffrench and Countess Helen?’ said Maurice, throwing away the end of his cigar.

‘Nothing. It was only Mrs. Brotherton who suggested that I and Mr. French should recite the Balcony Scene from “Romeo and Juliet” at the concert on Saturday afternoon.’

‘Very good of her, I am sure, to wish our friends to make guys of themselves.’

It was as much as Helen could do to restrain her temper.

‘I don’t think you need be the least afraid of my offending the aristocratic prejudices of Stourton, Sir Maurice;’ and turning away, she walked on through the gate.

When the Deringham carriage was announced, Margaret Corbett prepared to go. Lady Perceval told her to be sure and come back next day.

‘We have not much time before Saturday.’

‘No; you can count on me. Three o’clock, isn’t it? Mind you learn that Balcony Scene, Helen. “Oh for a falconer’s voice to lure that tassel-gentle back to me!”’ and with a merry laugh Margaret disappeared in the dark.

‘I can’t say I see much wit in Miss Corbett’s joke,’ said Maurice irritably.

‘What joke, dear?’ asked Lady Perceval.

‘Nothing. Good-night, mother; good-night, Countess de Ferrin;’ and turning away abruptly, he walked off into the garden.





## CHAPTER XVII.

*'Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point.'*

**T**HE next morning was as fine as only a May-day after rain can be, and Helen jumped out of bed to open her window, and inhale the scent of earth and flowers that arose towards her under the warm rays of the sun. A great Gloire de Dijon rose hung close to her head, and, intoxicated by its fragrant perfume, she plunged her face into its depths with fatuous delight. Then she raised her face, and let the soft morning breeze blow on it, whilst a vague sensation of renewed life and youth came over her, and a feeling of tenderness and happiness entered her heart. She stretched up, deter-

mined to pluck the rose and keep it as a memory of that moment ; but as she touched the delicate leaves they fell into her hands.

The day was so fine that Lady Perceval even was tempted to leave her room earlier, and she and Helen sauntered about the gardens, while Sir Maurice went his usual ride. He did not return to lunch, and Lady Perceval seemed pleased, and told Helen she was sure he had stopped at Deringham, for she saw him go that way.

After lunch Helen coiled herself into one of the armchairs in the south drawing-room, and begged off going out again.

‘I am so sorry I must leave you then, my dear,’ Lady Perceval had said. ‘I promised to attend the committee meeting at the Brothertons’, to make definite arrangements about the concert.’

The young woman was absorbed in the history of ‘Jane Eyre,’ when she heard a horse’s hoof on the gravel, and some minutes after a man’s foot, and the opening and



shutting of doors. Presently Sir Maurice Perceval, looking fresh and bright from his ride, put his head in at the door.

‘Where is my mother?’

‘Gone out.’

‘Where to?’

‘The Brothertons.’

‘What are you doing here?’

‘Reading.’

He walked across the room as he asked the question.

‘It’s a shame to remain indoors this lovely day. What can it be that interests you so tremendously?’

Helen held her book up, smiling.

“‘Jane Eyre!’ By Jove!’ taking the book, ‘you have come to a most interesting part, too—the description of the hero. Do you know, Countess de Ferrin,’ looking at her with laughing eyes over the top of the book, ‘that a French writer has said, “A woman’s lover is always the hero of the last novel she has read.” Do you think Mr. French answers to this description? “He was of middle height, and con-

siderable breadth of chest. He had a dark face, with stern features and heavy brow.”’

‘I wish you wouldn’t,’ she said, putting her hands to her ears.

‘I only asked an innocent question. But what wretched stuff this is!’ turning over the leaves as he spoke. “My very soul demands you. It will be satisfied, or it will take deadly vengeance on its frame.”’

‘I am told it is by one of your best novelists.’

‘What do you mean by “your”?’ he asked, an unacknowledged regret coming into his heart that she was not a country-woman of his own. ‘You are half English, French-polished every morning, so you need not be so stuck up.’

‘Am I?’ she said slowly.

‘I can assure you, you are; then you know the old story of the frog—— But I will promise not to chaff you if you will go upstairs and dress, to come for a walk.’

‘I am lazy,’ putting her hands behind her head; ‘besides, I have been out this morning.’

‘Yes, up and down under the garden wall with my mother. I am not accustomed, either, to be said “No” to.’

‘Because you are spoilt.’

‘Spoilt or not spoilt, I intend to continue to have my own way; it suits me. Now, shall I help you?’

‘No, thank you;’ and putting her hands on the arms of the chair, she emerged from its depths with a light spring. ‘I do not wish to go out; I am so comfortable here;’ and stretching herself, she sauntered to the window.

‘Please, Countess de Ferrin, do what I ask you,’ coming towards her as he spoke.

‘There, that is better,’ she answered, with a laugh, as she went.

Nothing is so tempting, yet nothing so difficult, to paint, either with the brush or in words, than a bright, golden sunshine; and nowhere, or at no time, is it brighter or more golden than on an English summer day after rain.

The Stourton estate was celebrated for its trees; it was a warm, light soil, and every

species seemed to flourish. The chestnut-trees bordering the garden were always the first in the county to burst into leaf ; the beech and oak woods rose in mounds of foliage behind, and here and there stood a monkey-puzzler or a fir-tree, looking like foreigners amongst the others. Outside the garden wall the unpruned espaliers, hoary and moss-grown with age, were allowed to grow as they listed, and made a close wall along the path with their angular, twisted branches. Farther back stretched the patriarchal apple and pear trees, that in the spring were pyramids of white and pink blossom, and in the autumn were red and gold with fruit. Beyond the orchard stood the ruins of the old monastery, that had flourished before the Reformation.

Maurice and Helen now sauntered down the bank of the lakelet that bathed its hoary walls, and had in days gone by served doubtless as fish-pond to the monks.

‘Fancy men having lived and prayed here centuries ago!’ said Helen, looking dreamily in the sunshine at the lancet

window, and at the stone cup for holy water that still remained fixed in the wall.

‘Set of old reprobates!’ muttered her companion.

Helen’s cheek flushed, and she gave him an indignant glance.

‘Forgive me, Countess de Ferrin ; I did not mean to this time. I forgot I should hurt you ; I really said what I meant, and had no intention of offending your prejudices.’

A few weeks before, Maurice would have taken a mischievous delight in exciting Helen’s susceptibilities on the subject of her religion ; now a feeling of frightened dismay came over him : he bent towards her in such a fervour of penitence that she was fain to forgive him.

‘You can’t help it, you see, Sir Maurice ; your views and mine are diametrically opposed, and we are not likely ever to agree.’

‘They are not so opposed as you think. We both of us are enjoying the beauty round us : there is thorough sympathy between us in that?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, a little dubiously.

‘I have no doubt our ancestors who succeeded to the monks were quite as great reprobates,’ he said, floundering into more blunders in the endeavour to make amends for the first one, as men generally do under such circumstances. ‘If you were to hear my mother talking about my grandfather and great-grandfather, you would imagine they had all been angels; whereas the real fact is, they squandered their patrimony and made havoc of everything. I am sure our family history is enough to make any man a Radical.’

As he spoke they reached the gate leading to the stable; they stopped and leaned over it, listening to the champing and stamping of the horses, the clucking of the hens, the buzzing of the bees from the hives that stood under the sunny patch of wall.

Moments come in everyone’s life when they feel the influence of earth and sky playing the prelude of their fate. The scent of a flower, the warmth of the sunshine, the rustling of the wind, will break

down barriers it has taken years to build up. Some who are strong shut all outside seductions from their heart ; others give way and let the stream of passion and desire hurry them headlong on its resistless current.

‘ Shall we walk on ? ’ he asked, a tremor in his voice.

‘ Yes ; where to ? ’

‘ Down by the canal and round over the bridge,’ was his answer, being seized with an indefinite wish to prolong his happiness as much as possible ; while she, thinking the scene fair, and inclined also to enjoy this companionship *à deux*, nodded an assent, and they pursued their way.

The canal, though hardly used now, had once been the principal means of communication between Stourton and the capital, and the lords of the manor had derived a considerable income from the traffic it brought. Now it ran like a silver band through the valley, its locks only rarely opened to admit the passage of a barge laden with hay or corn. Its tranquil calm, undisturbed

by the rush or ripple of a flowing stream, had fascinated Helen on her first arrival at Stourton, and it had become one of her favourite walks. She loved the banks carpeted with buttercups that were reflected in the still waters, and the expanses of gold and green fields that changed into lines in the distance and died away indistinct amongst the purple hills. In a dim way it recalled her home in France, where she remembered the poplars trembling in an old canal like this. Never, however, had it seemed more fascinating to her than to-day. The sun was behind them, and with his level rays made the mist shimmer and gleam where it lay brown above the town ; it transmuted the railway smoke into mother-of-pearl clouds, and threw the shadows of the telegraph-poles that stood along the bank distinct upon the pathway.

The air was heavy with the scent of the lime-trees and gardens which lay behind the moss-grown walls of Stourton. All nature was alive, from the swallows that dipped



every now and then into the water, to the gnats that flew in myriads around and flashed like golden sparks in the sunshine.

For a few moments both walked silent along the grassy path.

‘How dreadful it is,’ she said at last, ‘that we shall all be obliged to return to smoky dusty London; for I suppose your leave will soon be up, Sir Maurice?’

‘Yes, but I look forward rather with pleasure to London, now.’

‘I suppose there will be a great deal going on for you until the end of the season.’ As she spoke in an off-hand tone, she stooped and plucked one of those downy tufts which children call a ‘blowball;’ and putting it against her lips, sent the feathery seeds flying right and left.

‘What a crop you will sow!’

‘Yes; almost as mischievous a one as the gossip Mrs. Brotherton poured into your ear yesterday.’

Her companion winced under this thrust.

‘Seed becomes fruit!’ he said, taking up a stick and throwing it fiercely into the

water for the Newfoundland that had followed them from the stables.

Helen sauntered on, gathering flowers as she went. Suddenly a wish seized her to have one of the yellow iris that glistened among the sedges by the bank ; thoughtlessly she put her foot on the edge, the earth gave way, and, with a faint scream, she sank towards the water. Another second she would have been in, had not a strong arm seized her and held her back. For one moment she was powerless in his grasp—for one second their eyes met.

‘Please don’t do that again,’ he said hoarsely; a dark flush mounting to his neck and face, as he felt her breath on his cheek, and the trembling of her slight form in his arms, then letting her free, he added :

‘Go and rest a moment. I will pull you one of these iris out with my stick, for I suppose that is what you want.’

She was too bewildered to answer, and went and leant against one of the telegraph-poles standing along the pathway ; while he bent over, and, with considerable diffi-

culty, pulled out some of the dark green leaves and brought them to her.

‘Thank you so much, and also for saving me a good ducking ;’ she gasped, breaking into a half-hysterical laugh.

‘You look as if you had seen a ghost, you are so pale.’

‘Thank you ; it is nothing, only the fright ; and this wretched telegraph-post buzzes like a railway train in my ears.’

‘Of course it must. Come here and rest.’

‘No, thank you ; I don’t go near the water again.’

‘We must walk on then until we come to some place where we can sit down ;’ and he sauntered on with the dog as if nothing had happened.

Helen would have given anything to have turned and gone back. We all know the discomfort of the recurrence of a disagreeable thought : how it pulls us up short like a physical pang in the midst of a laughing crowd, while looking at a beautiful scene. She did not, however, dare to show what she really felt. They pursued

their way silently along the canal, until they came to the Stourton Bridge, which crossed it. The bridge was the great place of resort for the male population of the village. Here they discussed politics, the crops, and domestic affairs. For the Stourton lord of the creation was not above a good argument when he could get it, like a great many of his species. They were too genteel and conservative ever to indulge openly in scandal about their betters, but did not mind hinting, *sotto voce*, in their neighbour's ear what Mary Ann or Jane had heard in the servants'-hall at Stourton or Deringham, and recounted to them as the last piece of news. One thing they were unanimous in, and that was a deep affection and respect for their young Squire. 'His forbears were the right sort, and so be he; occupied with none of them new-fangled ideas of doin' away with the public-houses, and edicatin' the masses; just a ra'al gentleman that lives and lets live,' was the judgment of Stourton, and spoke

all the more for their disinterestedness in that he had no money, and could do nothing to gain popularity. Helen felt a thrill of pride as she saw the universal respect shown by the raising of hats and the murmured 'Good-day, Sir Maurice,' and as she looked askance at the handsome tall figure walking beside her, with its satisfied independence and easy pride, accepting homage as its right. Immediately afterwards she was indignant with herself. What was this change that had taken place within her? What was this sudden awakening to a hundred sensations and agitations that life had never known before? On crossing the bridge they ascended a path that led up the hill between hedges overtwined with bindweed, and lined with flowers and blossoms; she walked on, pale and resolute, while his voice, low and soft, sounded like music in her ears.

'What an evening for lovers! we unworthy people ought to have remained at home. Look, how beautiful it is!' and he turned towards the valley.

She closed her eyes for one second, while the vibration of his voice was in the air; when she opened them and looked on the scene before her, it was impressed on her memory for ever. The mist that blurred the village from their sight, although the sky above them was deep blue; the valley with its silver band, and the woods of Stourton stretching away, bathed in the rays of the descending sun, which glinted into Helen's already dazzled eyes. It seemed as if the inmost heart of nature were beating and throbbing before them, and yet their own hearts beat and throbbed quicker, more intensely.

‘Helen, turn your face and look at me as you did just now.’

These words were spoken in a low pleading tone, and on the pathway she saw the shadow of the tall figure move closer to her, while she stood stunned and bewildered. Maurice put his arm round her; she raised her face to protest, and in the impulse of his passion he bent down and kissed it. Her whole

being seemed to pause and stop in that one short second while his lips touched hers, the realities of life and existence were forgotten ; the arms of the man she loved were round her, and the singing of the lark close by, the scent of the flowers in the hedge, and the shining of the sun overhead, seemed all a portion of her personal ecstasy. Breathless, overcome, she panted at last :

‘ Have mercy, I implore you ! Let me go.’

‘ I will not let you go until you have told me that you love me.’

And then, his face white with deep intensity of feeling, he recklessly stammered the words of passion that had been in his heart so long.

‘ Why did I ever come ?’ she said, as with an effort she freed herself. ‘ I felt I ought not to.’

‘ You came here, brought by Fate, to tell me that you love me.’

He stretched out his arms with a supplicating gesture. It was the first time in his life that Maurice sued in vain.

‘ Never !’ And then, pausing until she

had regained her voice, she went on, 'There can never be any question of love between us.'

'Helen, I tell you all my hopes are set on your accepting my love, and consenting to be my wife.'

'It can never be!'

'In God's name, why?'

'I cannot tell you now. Ah, have pity!' laying her hand on her heart, she staggered back. 'Leave me!'

'Why? Listen to me, I implore you. I am no better and no worse than my neighbours. I have no very exalted ideas on the subject of woman; I was utterly free from sentimental illusions, and imagined I never could care for anyone, when I met you; and then—I cannot tell you what it was. I knew you were unlike anyone I had ever seen before, and—and—I fell in love with you.'

'Or thought you did.'

'Don't make it harder for me. You see, I have always been accustomed to have my own way, and I thought—I was almost



sure—you loved me. Helen, I am sure of it now. Look at me—tell me your reasons for acting as you are doing.’

‘My reasons are many,’ she said, endeavouring to steady her voice. ‘I am poor, you are poor. I am Catholic, you are Protestant. I am——’ She stopped.

‘Not in love with me!’

‘Not in love with you,’ she echoed sadly, hardly daring to face his eyes, and looking straight before her.

‘Ah! then indeed my suit is hopeless—for—listen, Helen. I could overcome my mother’s objections. Poverty—what does money matter? Religion—I have no prejudices; but if you do not care for me! Helen! is it true? Tell me is it so, or are you hiding something?’

‘It is true,’ she repeated again slowly.

‘Then I promise never to annoy you again, but will care for you to my life’s end.’ The deep voice quivered with irrepressible pain.

She did not answer, and turning, they both descended the hill. How different the

scene looked now! The sun had gone down in those few moments, and the landscape was grey and colourless.

Silently they both passed under the scrutinizing gaze of the loiterers on the bridge, and along the bank of the canal that now lay steely and dark in the dusk. The Newfoundland whined, endeavouring to attract his master's attention; but Maurice walked along, with pale face and set expression.

Having passed back through the garden, they at last reached an island of green shade that was a favourite resort of Helen's.

She sank back into the seat.

'Leave me,' she said. 'I would rather return alone.'

'Is your decision final? Do we part for ever?'

'We part for ever.'

'Give me your hand then; and be sure of this—in my wild and often dissipated life I have thought I cared for women, but never have I felt for them one quarter of what I feel for you. I bow my head, to your decision; but, is there no hope—no hope

in the future? Ah! remember they say in your country, “*Qui touche la main, touche le cœur.*” Remember the probabilities of life. Is there not a chance that sometime——’

‘Never,’ she answered faintly.

He almost threw her hand from him, and turning, strode away.

Helen sat on there after he had left her, the world seemed reeling away beneath her feet, the life she thought she had grasped melted away from around her, and she felt as forsaken and forlorn as any barefooted tramp by the roadway. Up against the evening sky stood the old house, calm and unmoved the smoke curling from its chimneys, the ilex-tree unstirred by a breath of wind, as if such things as sorrow and anguish did not exist; and there she sobbed out her pain—her poor heart crushed and bruised in the evitable retribution for the wrong-doing of others that ever descends on the children of men.

END OF VOL. I.

'Partir avant le jour à tâtons sans voir goutte,  
Sans songer seulement à demander sa route,  
Aller de chute en chute et se trainant ainsi.  
Faire un tiers du chemin jusqu'à pres de midi ;  
Voir sur sa tête alors s'amasser les nuages.  
Dans un sable mouvant precipiter ses pas,  
Courir, en essuyant orages sur orage  
Vers un but incertain, ou l'on n'arrive pas.  
Detrompé vers le soir, chercher un retraite,  
Arriver haletant, se coucher, s'endormir,  
On appelle cela naître, vivre et mourir  
La volonté de Dieu soit faite.'

FLORIAN.





Date	Time	Location	Remarks
1901	Jan 1	New York	Arrived at New York from London.
1902	Feb 15	New York	Left New York for London.
1903	Mar 10	London	Arrived at London from New York.
1904	Apr 20	London	Left London for New York.
1905	May 5	New York	Arrived at New York from London.
1906	Jun 15	New York	Left New York for London.
1907	Jul 10	London	Arrived at London from New York.
1908	Aug 20	London	Left London for New York.
1909	Sep 5	New York	Arrived at New York from London.
1910	Oct 15	New York	Left New York for London.
1911	Nov 10	London	Arrived at London from New York.
1912	Dec 20	London	Left London for New York.
1913	Jan 5	New York	Arrived at New York from London.
1914	Feb 15	New York	Left New York for London.
1915	Mar 10	London	Arrived at London from New York.
1916	Apr 20	London	Left London for New York.
1917	May 5	New York	Arrived at New York from London.

